A GARRISON TANGLE

by CAPTAIN CHARLES KING U·S·A·

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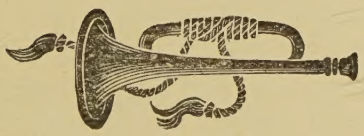

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A GARRISON TANGLE.

CHAPTER I.

Captain Turner had been up since first call for reveille, had spent a shivering hour at his troop stables, had tramped through the snow from the creek valley, up past the long line of ramshackle sheds that defaced the east front of the original Fort Russell, had declined the invitation of some of the old stagers and young plungers of his regiment to "come in and have something" at the trader's store by the gate, had plodded thoughtfully on to his own quarters some distance up the row, had had his bath and changed his stable garb for the best undress uniform he owned, and was now waiting somewhat impatiently for breakfast. The Cheyenne *Leader* had little in the way of telegraphic news, and its local gossip failed to interest him. He tossed it aside and, after a look into the little dining-room where the breakfast table was set for two, began pacing slowly up and down the tiny parlor, five paces one way and five back. Occasionally he

would cast a glance upward and listen for sounds of movement aloft, but none rewarded his attention. Presently he went to the window and, throwing aside the curtains, gazed gloomily out upon the snow-covered parade. Over across the barren, wind-swept level, bordered by its row of leafless, desolate, stripling cottonwoods, quivering in the rising breeze, the unsightly brown barracks were echeloned, their gable ends to the north and south, with the wooden tower, the official home of the officer of the guard, and behind it the dun-colored walls of the guardhouse, filling the gap at the opposite angle of the diamond-shaped quadrilateral. Here and there along the parade lay bare, unsightly patches of dead gray buffalo grass, where the wintry gales had swept away the falling snow, only to whirl it into deep drifts about the barracks. Beyond the rough wooden one-story buildings that framed the roadway bounding the parade, the snowy slopes dipped out of sight into the valley of the Crow, only to reappear half a mile beyond, defaced with the same broad gray patches and streaked with jagged lines of fleecy white where the snow lay fathoms deep in the ravines and *couleés*. Beyond them all, a hundred miles to the south, cold, remote and majestic, towered the peaks and domes of the Rockies, dazzling when the morn-

ing sun shone, but repellent and frowning now that his face was hid behind a dense veil of cloud that was drawn athwart the heavens. The scene was dreary in the last degree. Only about the guard-house was there sign of life and action, for in the intense cold the troopers hugged the comfort of their barracks and huddled about the red-hot stoves. The captain's face, somber and melancholy, yet a refined, clear cut, handsome face withal, seemed to take on an additional shade of gloom as he stood there, lonely and silent, drumming on the window panes with his finger tips. Through the thin partition in the party wall of wood, that separated his soldier home from that of Captain Wayne next door, came the sound of cheery voices, of joyous laughter and childish glee. Turner sighed heavily as he took out his watch, glanced at it and turned impatiently. Even as he left the window a trumpeter, muffled in heavy overcoat, came briskly out from the adjutant's office and sounded first call for guard mounting, whereat the captain strode through the dining-room and poked his head into the kitchen beyond.

"Nora," he said, "be so kind as to run up and tell Mrs. Turner not to hurry if she's tired, but that I'm on a garrison court this morning and must have my breakfast at once."

Wiping her hands on her apron, the Irish maid-of-all-work proceeded on her mission. She was back in a moment. "The missus says not to wait. She'll be down directly," was her report.

"Very well. Bring me whatever is ready," said Turner, briefly, and sat him down at the table.

There had been a lively hop the night before and joy was unconfined. A dozen pleasant people had driven out from Cheyenne. The music was capital. Half a dozen young officers from other posts were visiting at Russell. Half a dozen young ladies from the distant East were visiting relatives and friends among the officers' families in the garrison. Many of the ladies of the —th Cavalry were charming "society" women; many were pretty and attractive; several were wealthy and able to display stunning toilets, and nearly all were graceful and accomplished dancers. As a consequence, anywhere from thirty to forty couples were to be seen on the polished floor of the hop-room, and visiting officers from other regiments promptly owned that when it came to "hopping" the —th could put up the prettiest dance in the army.

And hops were things Mrs. Turner dearly loved. Ten years the junior of her solemn-looking spouse, she had married when only eighteen, had never borne him son or daughter, had been with the reg-

iment in the South just after the great war, in Nebraska when they were guarding the track-layers of the Union Pacific, in Arizona during that four years exile, in Kansas on their return, and was now facing, with the sisterhood, the skin-scorching Wyoming blizzards, and bemoaning when alone with her lord the horrid effect of the dazzling suns and blasting gales upon her once peachlike complexion. Among her garrison and Cheyenne intimates and acquaintances, however, Fanny Turner had no such admission to make. She could not help seeing, she said, the havoc played with the cuticle of the other ladies. Even their bride, the lovely blonde, Mrs. Billy Ray, had completely lost, said Mrs. Turner, the delicate bloom and softness of her fair white skin. "But as for me," she continued," I declare it seems to make no difference whatever."

Certainly, under the light of the lamps and candles of the hop-room, her complexion seemed as peachy as on her wedding day thirteen years gone by. But there were a dozen women in garrison who were ready to explain and account for that. "No one in this regiment," said the colonel's wife, "can approach Fanny Turner in the art of 'making up.' She's thirty-two if she's a week old, and she dances and dresses and—decorates—as though she were not twenty."

All of which was practically true. Spoiled and petted by an over-indulgent mother in her girlhood, Fanny had no idea of any will or way but her own when she married Captain Turner. He had fallen deeply in love with her when home wounded after Cedar Creek in the fall of '64. He was the hero of their semi-rural community, and she married him because he was so much thought of and admired bysome of the others. For several weeks Turner thought himself the happiest and luckiest of men to have captured this fair young beauty, and then disillusion set in and one disappointment followed another. She was empty-headed, frivolous, fond of every kind of social gayety, but with neither heart nor hand for domestic duty of any kind. She loved to dance, and his wounds had put an end to even the little he ever knew of that art. She gloried in the attentions of the society and garrison beaux they met, and plainly showed him he was often in the way. She was recklessly extravagant in her tastes and spent his savings with a lavish hand, principally on herself in dress or jewelry. She had been denied almost everything of the kind at home, for her parents had been for years in straightened circumstances. Turner, deeply in love, could deny her nothing until his savings were exhausted, and they had to come down to his pay She read nothing

but novels. She knew nothing but garrison gossip and how to make herself look fascinating. She had a fund of small talk, and a faculty of setting her cap for each new young officer that joined the regiment, speedily fascinating him and attaching him for a term of months, or possibly a year, to her apron strings. She was artless, kittenish, confidingly, trustingly youthful—this mature dame of thirty-one—when out in society or among her sisters of the garrison ; but it was anything but a fresh, youthful, radiant girl that came yawning languidly down the stairs this dark March morning, and with a "Why didn't you order your breakfast earlier if you wanted it?" and barely a glance at her spouse, passed him by without other salutation, and took her seat behind the coffee-pot at the head of the table.

"I much preferred to wait for you," said Turner gently. He had never rebuked, and rarely attempted to correct her, since the initial attempt that well nigh wrecked their honeymoon. He could not scold her now, yet his heart ached at her indifference, and his weary eyes did not fail to notice the marvelous change in her appearance since she left the hop-room the night before, or rather at two o'clock that morning. The soft pink lips were dry and purple now, the delicately tinted cheek was sallow

and colorless, dark purple circles had formed under her eyes; deep lines cracked out through their temporary filling and gave the lie to her pretentions to youth. Her hair, so beautifully and becomingly arranged the night before, was simply twisted up into a knot at the back of her head. She wore a loose flowered wrapper, gathered in at the slender waist with a cord. Even her white, fragile hands, that trembled as she filled the captain's cup with coffee, looked wrinkled and old, while upon her visage, so radiant with smiles and sunshine a few hours since, there sat an expression of profound and envious discontent. Turner had hard work to repress a second sigh as he glanced furtively at her from over the *Leader*, which he had picked up again when her footsteps were heard descending the stairs.

"May I help you to steak?" he asked, in courteous tone. "I fear you are very tired this morning, Fanny. You had a grand time last night though. You never missed a dance, did you?"

"I? Why how odd that would be! I never *do* miss a dance. That's one of the advantages of having so many old friends among the young officers."

"But you must be hungry, dear. Won't you try to eat something?"

"What is there?" she asked languidly. "Steak,

stewed potatoes. Bah! Scrambled eggs—cold; rolls ditto. I wish those children next door wouldn't make such a noise. Captain Turner," she went on, toying with her coffee spoon, "did you see that gown of Mrs. Gregg's last night? It was one she had made in Chicago—three hundred dollars if it cost a cent. Now you know perfectly well she can't afford that since the failure of their bank."

Turner was studying the advertisements hard, and made no answer.

"And his pay isn't as big as yours by one fogy," she went on. Then as he was still silent she queried, "*Is* it?"

"Oh! ah! Is it what?"

"I wish you would listen to me instead of losing yourself in that stupid paper, Captain Turner. I asked whether Captain Gregg's pay was not less than yours by a fogy or so."

"Very probably. He entered service some years after I did, and is nearly fifteen years younger."

But Turner talks from behind his paper. He has finished his breakfast, all but the cup of steaming coffee with which she has at last supplied him.

"What did you think of that gown of Mrs. Gregg's? She had it made only two months ago—two months after their bank broke. Seems to me

mighty queer she should be 'swelling' in such extravagant style—Mrs. Raymond thinks so too."

Turner's eyes are glued to the columns of the *Leader*. He is apparently deaf to any comments on Mrs. Gregg's costume.

"Don't you think so?" persists Mrs. Turner, determined to extract an opinion from her liege.

"Why—I'm sure I haven't given the matter any thought. It's none of our affair, you know. Doubtless they have means that were not involved in the crash of that particular bank."

"They haven't," interposes Mrs. Turner. "Mrs. Wallace is from Cleveland and knows all Mrs. Gregg's people, and she says they lost every penny."

"Oh, well, Gregg has something outside his pay," says Turner, shrugging his shoulders and sinking down into his chair. He hates these perennial comments and criticisms on the affairs of his brother officers and their families, but he still loves his shallowpate of a wife and can't bear to rebuke her. This, too, is her table-talk. She has no other.

"There were at least half a dozen bills came in their mail two days ago," persists madame presently. "I couldn't help seeing them when the orderly came here with my letter from Kate. If *I* had so many bills coming in *you'd* be frantic. I don't see how

she can stand being dunned in that way. *I* couldn't."

Again the captain seeks shelter behind his conventional bomb-proof—the paper—and strives to avoid the discussion.

"Could you?" she asks.

"Well," he answers slowly, "I've had to once or twice. Don't you remember?"

"I might have known you'd remind me of that," she answers, with tears in her voice if not in her eyes. "I was much—less experienced then." Even to her liege lord Mrs. Turner does not like to own she has ever been younger.

He notes the symptoms of approaching storm, and to give a cheerier tone to the talk, drops the *Leader* and adopts a "chipper," spirited style.

"I thought *you* looked uncommonly well last night, Fanny, and I thought Mrs. Ray's dress extremely pretty."

"Pretty!" says madame disdainfully. "Why, Captain Turner, she was positively dowdy. The idea of a woman of her wealth and social position coming to one of our swellest hops in a simple China silk is almost an affront to the regiment. If she had nothing handsomer it would be all well and good, but she has loads of handsome gowns and won't wear them."

"China silk or Canton flannel, you know, I couldn't tell t'other from which," says poor Turner "I only say I thought it pretty and appropriate. Perhaps she wears a simple toilet because so many of the ladies of the regiment cannot afford to dress expensively."

"Captain Turner, you make me tired!" exclaims his better half, in deep displeasure. "No one wants Mrs. Ray to be setting examples in economy. The ladies of the —th are quite capable of managing their own affairs—except perhaps Mrs. Gregg."

Are they, thinks poor Turner, as he mentally runs over the list of bills accumulated in his desk, the result of madame's orders and extravagances, but again he relapses into silence and seeks refuge behind the *Leader*. Then relief and rescue come in sudden shape. The boards of the piazza creak and snap in the biting cold under a quick, bounding footstep. The gong bell on the hall door gives a loud, impatient clang, and Nora hastens through into the hall.

"The orderly with the colonel's compliments, I suppose," says Mrs. Turner dejectedly. "They never will let you finish your breakfast in peace."

"They might," thinks Turner, "if I could only get started a little earlier." Then back comes Nora.

"It's Loot'n't Maynard wants to see you, sir."

"Oh! Show him into the parlor," answers the captain, dropping the *Leader* and beginning to fold his napkin.

"Captain Turner, have you no consideration whatever for me?" gasps his lady, as she rises and betakes herself hurriedly to the kitchen.

A very presentable specimen of the young officer type is the junior lieutenant who, forage cap in hand and his cavalry circular, the cape of his overcoat, thrown over his arm, stands respectfully in the little army parlor as the captain enters and extends a cordial hand.

"Good-morning, Maynard. Glad to see you. What brings you over here so early? Nothing amiss, I hope."

"I—didn't mean—I hope I didn't disturb your breakfast, sir," answers the subaltern, a shade of embarrassment on his fine, frank face. "Mrs. Turner was so good as to say if I would come around this morning, er— she'd teach me some new methods at Patience, and the adjutant has just detailed me to take a patrol to go to town after some absentees still on payday spree. If you'll be kind enough to tell her—I suppose she's not yet down after dancing every dance until two this morning——"

"I'll tell her," says Turner. "She'll be disap-

pointed, of course, but come again some other time. Any news at the office?"

"Why, yes, sir. There's quite a little stir there. It seems a gang of the Southern Cheyennes have had a row with their agent and have been playing the mischief about their reservation. The agent has wired for troops, and if they're sent from Leavenworth and Gibson they say the Indians will jump. Spring has set in down there. The chief believes that in that event we'll be called upon to head them off."

"May the Lord deliver us from a winter campaign," says Turner anxiously. "Well, I'll tell Mrs. Turner. Wish you good luck in catching the runaways. How many are still out?"

"Eight, sir; so I'm told at the office. Then I'll say good morning," and Mr. Maynard starts to go.

But a soft, silvery voice, a voice utterly unlike the petulant tones so recently heard at the breakfast table, comes from behind the *portière* that hangs from the archway between the parlor and dining-room, and halts him at the threshold.

"Don't look back, Mr. Maynard; I'm simply a fright this morning, but I couldn't help speaking to you. I'm so sorry you can't be here at eleven. Come this afternoon, if you get back in time, won't you? Come at three. That'll give you an hour before stables. *Do*"

Maynard hesitates. "I'd like to, awfully, Mrs. Turner," he says, "but I—I've got an engagement at that hour."

"Ah, yes," answers Mrs. Turner. "No need to say where. I know who's expecting you at the Barrys'. I'm positively getting jealous, Mr. Maynard."

The young fellow's cheeks are burning with a flush that is not caused by the buffetings of the Wyoming winds. "I'll be glad to come almost any other time you say, Mrs. Turner. I'm sure it's very good of you—but, pardon me, won't you, the patrol is saddling at the stable and I must hurry down there."

She has no time to fire another shot before he is out of the house and slamming the storm door behind him. Then she comes into the parlor and peers out of the window as though to see whether he goes at once to stables, or stops, as she more than half believes he will, at the Barrys'. The captain is pulling on his "Arctics" in the hallway and presently appears at the door, looping the frogs of his heavy, fur-lined coat—a coat that had once been a handsome garment, but is old and worn and shabby now.

"I think Mrs. Barry ought to put a stop to that affair before it goes any further," says Mrs. Turner,

whereat the captain becomes sphinxlike and inscrutable. Apparently he hasn't heard. "Neither of them has a cent in the world except his second lieutenant's pay," she goes on, and Turner finds himself rummaging through his pockets as though in search of some much-needed article, for he still has nothing to say. Then she turns and faces him. "Don't you?" she asks.

"Don't I what?" he replies, in simulated ignorance. He is fencing for time.

"Now, Captain Turner, I know you heard what I asked. You always behave in this absurd way when what I am thinking and talking about doesn't happen to suit you. I said neither Mr. Maynard nor Miss Baird had a cent, and that Mrs. Barry ought to put a stop to their flirtation at once—and you heard it."

"I think it is none of our business, Fanny," says Turner mildly. "Just as I said about Mrs. Gregg's gown. I can't help wishing you concerned yourself less about other people's affairs, my dear little woman," he adds, after a pause. "You—you haven't said anything to anybody but me as to the letters that came for Mrs. Gregg, have you?" he asks almost timidly.

"Her bills, I suppose you mean. If I have, Captain Turner, it only serves her right. I'm sure she has shown *me* little mercy or consideration."

"Well, dear, for my sake, then, don't speak of it to anybody. Gregg is one of my firmest friends, and whatever you say of his wife is sure to get around to them sooner or later in aggravated—exaggerated—form, and it would hurt him cruelly."

Mrs. Turner has impatiently whirled about and is once more gazing out upon the parade. A petulant exclamation escapes her before his words are finished. She is black-browed—pouting now.

"You haven't spoken of it to any one, have you, dear?" he asks.

No answer.

Turner walks close up to her as she stands half shrouded by the curtains. "Don't be afraid to tell me, Fan," he pleads. "I think I ought to know."

"Afraid!" she flashes indignantly. "What is there to be afraid of? Very possibly I *have* spoken of it to Mrs. Raymond, who notices just exactly what I have—and there may have been others who heard, for all I care. They know it's just exactly as I say. How can you be so absurd and make such a fuss over such a little matter. I'd just as lief say it to her face."

"Say it to no one," are Turner's next words. "Your imprudence has cost me two or three friendships I valued, and I should hate to be at odds with Gregg. Now it is time for me to go. Do not ex-

pect me until luncheon. The moment court adjourns I must go to the troop office."

She never turns to say good-by. Her sullen face is pressed close to the pane, but she darts back quickly as two tall officers come suddenly in sight—Captain Truscott and Lieutenant Blake. Turner, too, catches sight of them as they march quickly by, and waits a moment to let them get well up the row ahead of him. He is in no mood for companionship. He looks sadly, wistfully at the willful woman before him a moment, but her back is obstinately turned to him. She returns to the window, and without another word he leaves the house. At the gate he glances toward the casement, hopeful of one relenting look or smile, but now she has disappeared, and Turner goes on to his duty with a long sigh and a heavy heart.

"It is my own doing," he says. "If I had set my foot down firmly years ago she would have learned and forgiven; but its too late now—too late."

As he is passing Major Barry's quarters the storm door flies open and out comes the senior battalion commander himself, gray mustached, keen eyed, spare of flesh, alert, and vigorous. "Ha! Turner," he says, "well met. Have you heard any particulars? Do you know what we're to do?"

"I've heard nothing, major, except a rumor of trouble at the South Cheyenne agency."

"Indeed! Well, the colonel has just sent me word that our battalion is to be put in readiness for immediate field service, and a scrimmage is coming sure."

CHAPTER II.

When the little two-company post of Fort Fred Winthrop was broken up, Major Barry, of the —th Cavalry, was left without a command, and so was sent to the headquarters of the regiment at Russell. The junior major, Stannard, was already there, but eight troops had been crowded within the rickety fenced enclosure, and that gave each major four troops—what was then called a battalion. Stannard swore a little after his explosive fashion. He had been second in command ever since their return from the Sioux campaign of 1876, and he hated to see an officer come in between him and the top. Not that he disliked Barry. They were on very good terms, though not exactly intimate. But Barry's coming necessitated a general shaking up as to quarters, for he had to turn out a senior captain in order to get the house to which his rank entitled him, and there were several more midwinter movings as a consequence. "I'm sorry," he said, "heartily sorry, but you all know Mrs. Barry is an invalid, and I have to find comfortable quarters for her."

Mrs. Barry was indeed an invalid. She lay for hours every day on a couch especially prepared for her, rarely even drove in the open air, and was in bed every night by nine o'clock. Her main entertainment consisted in being read to, and this duty was divided between her devoted husband and her companion, Miss Nathalie Baird. Mrs. Barry was essentially a gentlewoman, courteous and considerate by nature, and refined with that almost ultra refinement that is the product of long-protracted physical suffering. The few relatives left to Miss Baird considered her a very fortunate girl when she was offered the position of companion to Mrs. Barry, even though the salary was not large; and indeed her lot, for an orphan girl practically homeless, was anything but a hard one. She had been teaching in the village school and leading a life of almost thankless drudgery. Her health was suffering. She had not even nourishing food; boarding around, first in one family, then in another, in that narrow New England circle, and she hailed with delight the change that took her to the broad, free frontier, to a little army home where there was sympathy, kindliness, and comfort. Her duties were light. She read aloud from books of Mrs. Barry's selection each morning from ten to twelve, but was given most of the afternoon for exercise and recreation.

From two to four the major himself sat by the side of the gentle invalid, and in the evening, as a rule, both were with her. Mrs. Barry's tastes were scholarly, and the morning readings were a liberal education to the village girl whose previous life had been so cramped and restricted. She proved most faithful—indeed, most grateful. She grew and thrived and blossomed in the society of her protectors and friends. She grew to love Mrs. Barry as she had loved none of her own kith and kin since the death of her mother five years gone by. Her father she could remember only vaguely. She was barely four years old when his coffined remains, draped in the flag he had died to defend, were brought back from Virginia and laid away in the little churchyard. She was a gentle, pure-hearted maid, only nineteen this stormy spring of 1878. She had been somewhat angular, and bony, and hollow-eyed, and sallow-cheeked when first she came to the Barrys, but healthful food, and exercise, and the bracing mountain air, and sound sleep, and sweet companionship, and freedom from care and worry, one and all had done their work; and Mrs. Barry woke up one fine day to the realization that they had a genuine New England beauty under their roof—a winsome girl, whose features and coloring were as dainty and fair as those of the Puritan

maid, Priscilla. The thin neck and bony shoulders and arms had given place to firm, rounded, dimpled members, beneath a skin so white as to be almost dazzling. The hollow eyes were gone, for a tender light burned in their blue depths, a delicate flush played over the soft, rounded cheeks, and a smile of sweet content hovered about the corners of her rosy mouth, that, a year gone by, quivered, pale and piteous.

"How that girl has improved since you brought her out, dear!" said the major, one sunshiny afternoon as Nathalie started for her brisk walk over the prairie.

"Then you've noticed it," answered the invalid, patting his big brown hand. "It has been very sweet to me to watch it. She's a good, true-hearted girl, Arthur."

"Oh, I'm not the only one to notice it, Mary. Several people have spoken of it to me, and as for young Maynard, I'm afraid it's getting serious."

"My responsibility is a very grave one where she is concerned," said Mrs. Barry, after a thoughtful pause. "Of course I could not but know that Mr. Maynard was greatly attracted, else he wouldn't have managed to walk with her or to call here so often. Do you know anything of his people?"

"Nothing whatever, and little of him except that

he acts like a gentleman on all occasions, attends to his duties, doesn't drink or gamble, and lives within his means. Stannard and Truscott say he's one of the best of the youngsters, and Blake says he stood the initiatory six months at Mrs. Turner's apron strings without a sign of singeing his wings."

"Well, that thralldom is at an end, certainly," said Mrs. Barry. "He came here and asked her to go to the next hop with him, and begged me to intercede. I did. I told her I'd like to have her go if only to look on, but she wouldn't do it. She says she never danced in her life. Mrs. Stannard came in a while ago and she talked with her—offered to be her chaperon, and was as kind and sweet as possible, but Nathalie shook her head and compressed her lips, and we saw it was useless. But others admire her beside Mr. Maynard—Hunter and Dana visit us frequently, and Dana has invited her to drive, but she declined. *Why*, do you suppose?"

"Her puritanical bringing up probably. Dana isn't half a bad fellow and comes of good stock. Hunter doesn't amount to much. He's feather-brained. Well, let's get at our book."

And meantime the object of this household chat was picking her way among the drifts, and walking blithely and briskly over the barren prairie, well to the north of the post, singing solemn little songs to

herself—sober, old-fashioned hymn tunes as a rule, yet catching herself now and then humming some one of the stirring quicksteps or waltzes she had heard at the band concerts, whereat she would suddenly break off and return to "Brattle Street" or "Coronation." "Jerusalem the Golden," it seems, had been deemed too jubilant, consequently too carnal, by the elders of her village church—elders, several of whom came, as did her paternal ancestors, from the old Scotch Covenanters. That she dearly loved music and had a quick and accurate ear was manifest the moment she opened her pretty mouth and gave voice to her favorites. So, too, was it apparent that all her childhood and young maidenhood had been spent under the strict tutelage of the descendants of a Puritan ancestry to whom a smile upon the Sabbath day was akin to sacrilege. One of Mrs. Barry's amusing stories, told when Nathalie was out for her daily exercise, was of the girl's dismay and distress when, the very first Sunday after their arrival at Russell, the band played its jolliest "double time" for the details marching out to guard mounting. "She ran to her room and stopped her ears," said Mrs. Barry, laughing at the reminiscence, "and could not be induced to come to the window and watch the ceremony, nor would she come out of her room until I assured her the

band had gone back to barracks. She should have been named Prudence or Rachel or Patience or Charity. How on earth could such a little Puritan have come by the name of Nathalie. One would imagine Sunday to be a day of penance with her. I'm sure she is shocked to see the major opening his morning paper and reading his letters. Sometimes a letter from her old home comes to her on Sunday, but she puts it away until Monday morning. I never have her read to me on Sunday. She goes to service morning and evening, reads her Bible and some very edifying church library volumes between times, and is so solemn, not to say lugubrious, that I am heartily sorry when Saturday night comes, and correspondingly rejoiced when the sun goes down on Sunday. Then she can smile again. Think what her childhood must have been."

Solemn and sedate as she had been taught to be on Sunday there was no question as to her elasticity and health and spirits the rest of the week. She skimmed away over the prairie fast and free, glorying in the upland breeze, the rare and exhilarating atmosphere, the radiant sunshine, and her own exuberant strength and vitality. "How that girl could dance if she only would dance!" said Mr. Tommy Hollis, whose highest idea of garrison life was a german every week and a hop every night.

Up at Winthrop all the officers were married, and, this being her first experience in army life, Nathalie was very shy and constrained. She thought both men and women frivolous in the extreme, utterly lacking in that serious, meditative quality which at her home was accepted as evidence of a religious nature and a reasonable hope of ultimate salvation. Elder Pease, she was sure, would have comprehensively stamped them all, except perhaps Mrs. Barry, and possibly the major, as "carnal." But she was physically in a sort of state of transition then, being still angular and sallow for the first few weeks, and only slowly evolving into the lily-like beauty that manifested itself at Russell. She had had no one to interrupt her prairie tramps at Winthrop.

But here at Russell a new world burst upon her astonished vision. Here she found herself followed, sought, waylaid by three or four very presentable and pleasing young men in most becoming uniforms —"regimentals" she called them, as she had learned to in her far New England home—and all the Puritanism in the world was not proof against the woman latent in her. Do what she could to shame it, *beat* it down, abjure it as "carnal and worldly," this homage was sweet to her fresh girlish heart. It made her deliciously happy in spite of herself.

She tried to overcome it by dressing in still more somber shades and styles at first, but her kind friend and protector protested. Mrs. Barry told her emphatically that no girl should be allowed to make herself hideous when nature manifestly intended her to look radiantly pretty. The Quakerlike hood and cloak were consequently discarded, not without prickings of conscience on Nathalie's part, and yet, with easier resignation than she had deemed possible, she allowed herself to be attired in the hat and jacket and gloves Mrs. Barry had ordered from Chicago, and then, as Hunter said, she was simply as stunning as anything he had ever seen at West Point.

Then, too, she had at first been grievously embarrassed by the attentions of the bachelor officers. No gentleman had ever asked her to walk or drive or ride—much less to dance—before, although it had often occurred that Elder Pease or Deacon Drummond would happen along about the time she dismissed her scholars and started on her long, lonely walk in the wintry gloaming, and, whichever one it was, he would accompany her much of the way and talk in most edifying fashion of the world, the flesh and the devil. Twice it came to pass that these two pillars of the church appeared upon the scene—as they had not come—together. They

seemed to have concentrated on the little stone schoolhouse from widely different directions, each serenely unconscious of the other's movements. These two worthy men, it is remembered, were most vehemently opposed to Nathalie's acceptance of the Barrys' offer. She ought never to be allowed to live among the godless men and women who dwelt in army barracks. They were children of wrath whose presence was contamination. But there was a hard-headed old uncle, a scoffer, said Elder Pease, who loved Nathalie, both for herself and for her mother's sake, an uncle who had a painfully big and dependent brood of his own, who bade her go by all means, though he nearly broke down at parting. Yet when she was gone he turned upon elder and deacon both, with triumph in his eyes.

At first, too, Nathalie shrank from accepting these invitations to walk, and as for going driving, Mrs. Barry had almost to order her. She was painfully shy and embarrassed for a few days, and then that began to wear off and keen enjoyment replaced the shyness. Even when she started out alone she speedily became aware of Maynard scouring the prairie on his spirited horse, leaping the broad *acequia* again and again, and finally riding up in surprise to see her, and dismounting to walk by her side, while Rienzi, with mincing gait, came towing along behind.

But for this keen, raw, darksome afternoon the engagement had been made beforehand. "The boys" were finding each other very much in the way. To get a walk or chat with Miss Baird now one had to see her several days ahead and make an appointment. There had been no very bad weather since the Barrys came, and she rarely missed her week-day exercise of a three-mile tramp each afternoon, and the man who walked with her need not hope to saunter, much less to "spoon." Miss Baird was "out for business," as Dana said, and it was quick march, one hundred and twenty to the minute, and a good swinging stride from start to finish.

Then Mrs. Barry was becoming interested in Maynard's devotions. When she first arrived at the post, and knew him and heard him referred to as "Mrs. Turner's latest," she was not disposed to like him. She had heard of Mrs. Turner, but never before had been stationed at the same post with her. She forgot at first that every young fellow on reporting for duty at regimental headquarters was immediately "annexed" by this fair, volatile, and would-be youthful matron. She forgot, until laughingly reminded by Mrs. Stannard, that Hunter, Dana, Hollis—almost all the boys in fact—had served their apprenticeship. Blake, the regimental jester, said that plebehood in the regiment had its infallibly

visible signs just as it had at West Point. In the —th the most prominent symptom was dancing attendance on Mrs. Turner. But Maynard had barely been well settled down into the traces—had served much less than half the allotted twelve-month—when the Barrys came to the post, and with them this blue-eyed, fair-haired, peachy-cheeked Puritan maid, and Mrs. Turner's sway became uncertain. She still assumed airs of proprietorship—Maynard still had to call for and escort her to the weekly hops, and only the night before, seeing him making for the outer air in the midst of the dance, although she was leaning on the arm of a partner at the moment, she called after her "orderly," as Blake designated her successive victims, and languidly spoke: "Oh, Mr. Maynard, would you mind bringing me a glass of water," and then when he obediently turned and presently appeared with a brimming goblet, she sipped a ripple or two from the surface and, ignoring her partner for the moment, murmured, "Where were you going?"

"Over home a few minutes. I have no dances now, you know, until after supper."

"You won't find a soul up at the Barrys, unless you've made an appointment. Have you?"

"None whatever, Mrs. Turner," answered May-

nard, flushing with annoyance and embarrassment. "Nor did I think of going there."

"I think you are very mean to want to leave me the moment you've had your dance. You haven't been as kind as you were before Miss Baird came. Come, Mr. Crane," she said, turning to her partner with an air of patient, pathetic, but undeserved sorrow. "Let us go and sit down somewhere. I don't think I care to dance this set."

And Maynard strode away across the dark parade toward the distant lights of officers' row, feeling as though he must have inflicted something akin to heartache on a winsome and appealing woman, yet vaguely conscious that he ought not to be held to the species of servitude or subjected to the surveillance which seemed to be his lot since falling within the sphere of Mrs. Turner's attractions. His own quarters were well down toward the east end of the row. Major Barry's were just as far toward the west; but no sooner was he beyond the range of the hop-room lights than the young officer veered toward the west end, and presently brought up at the picket fence that fronted the entire line. The Barrys' parlor lights were extinguished, but a faint glimmer came through the shades of the front dormer window of the second floor, and that was *her* room—Mrs. Barry's being on the ground floor.

The night, as has been said, was dark and overcast. The Cheyenne zephyr, a stiff gale that blew three days out of four down from the mountain pass to the northwest, and across the open prairie, had died away at nightfall, and all was as still as the night was dark. Over across the parade the string band of the —th was playing rollicking, *opera bouffe* music for the Lancers which Mrs. Turner felt too fatigued or hurt to dance. They were winding through the final figure now, and even though the doors and windows were closed against the keen wintry air, so still and breathless was nature that the soft hum of voices or occasional burst of silvery laughter was borne with the music upon the wings of night. Leaning there upon the fence, young Maynard had turned his back to the sounds of merriment and was gazing fixedly at that upper window. For nearly a week he had realized that within that little room, behind that screening shade, there dwelt the one fair girl who held his fate, for weal or woe, in the hollow of her soft white hand.

Then the music suddenly ceased. The "Lancers" was over. The musicians could have a five minutes' breathing spell before they struck up the waltz, and then, as if she had only been waiting for the stopping of that profane and frivolous dance tune, the fair occupant, or at least her faint shadow, appeared

at the window. Maynard started with joy. He could feel the instant bounding of his heart. Quickly the shade was raised. Up went the window, and the outlines of the pretty head, and the slender girlish form that were the object of his idolatry, appeared at the casement. Resting her elbows on the sill, her cheeks upon her hands, Nathalie leaned out into the night, drinking in the mountain air. It was just ten o'clock and the trumpeter from the adjutant's office had come out upon the dark parade and was sounding, as was the custom at that time, "lights out" at that comparatively early hour. Just as the window was raised Maynard was sure he heard the sound of footsteps across the road, the crunching of boot heels in the snow and ice heaped up along the *acequia* that edged the parade, and, glancing thither, he distinctly saw the figure of a man in heavy overcoat and derby hat between him and the lights of "B" troop's barracks. But at the first note of "taps" these lights were extinguished and he could see no more of the stranger, nor did he care to. All his thoughts and longings were concentrated on that fair, yet dark form at the casement above. He watched it with worship in his eyes. To-morrow—to morrow afternoon he was to accompany her on her walk. Could he summon courage enough to tell his sweet secret? Was it

wisdom to do so now when she had known him so short a time? Would it not be apt to startle, even to shock her?

That footstep again—and still in front of the Barrys' quarters! Maynard had almost forgotten the wanderer. "Some one of the hack drivers from town," he said to himself, "trying to make his way to the store for a drink and a 'loaf' by the stove." But instead of going on down to the store the fellow was still prowling somewhere there in the dark across the road, and dark it was as Erebus. No! He's coming across, coming steathily, too, for the footfalls though audible told that the prowler was tiptoeing as well as he could in heavy, triple-soled boots. What could that mean?

From his post, at the fence opposite the open space at the side of the house, Maynard listened, breathless. The footfalls ceased, but still no form could be seen. Then a strange thing happened. He could have sworn he heard in hoarse whisper her name, "Nathalie." Straining his ears he heard it, beyond possibility of doubt, again. But she remained immovable, except that now her face was turned upward as though she were communing with the spirits of those she loved who had been taken from earth. Marveling, wondering, stricken with a jealous dread, Maynard felt that he was growing

suddenly cold, that his knees were trembling—or was it a shiver?

The next instant there came the sound of sudden snap or crack, then a bounding and rolling, as of a pebble, down the shingle roof of the piazza into the tin gutter that edged it. Startled from her reverie, frightened she knew not at what, the girl instantly fell back and pulled down the shade. Maynard could stand it no longer. Bounding out into the road he hurled himself upon the tall, dim but burly figure—a man whose hat was pulled down over his eyes and whose coat collar was up about his ears. "Who are you and what are you doing here?" he fiercely demanded. For just about three seconds the advantage of a surprise was his. Then he felt himself suddenly hurled backward, tripped and flung with overpowering, stunning force upon the icy roadway. His head struck the solid earth with a crack that sent a thousand stars dancing before his eyes, and when he scrambled dizzily to his feet the muscular intruder had vanished.

CHAPTER III.

MAYNARD'S head was still sore when he turned out for reveille roll call the next morning. He had made ineffectual search for his conqueror, had questioned the sentry at the east front, and the hackman who brought the town guests out to the hop, but no such person as he described had been seen by any of them. He went to his quarters and bathed his aching head, and then he had to return to the hop-room. Mrs. Turner rallied him upon his pallor and his utter lack of devotion, and finding him still in somber mood had changed her tactics and adopted the anxious and sympathetic rôle. Surely something must have gone amiss with him, she said. But Maynard would admit nothing. He was dazed by the strange adventure. He could not—he would not speak of it to a soul. What would not be the excitement in garrison were he to announce that a stranger, a civilian, was under Miss Baird's window at ten o'clock, calling her by her Christian name and tossing pebbles at her window to attract her attention! He was glad of the detail which took

him with his little patrol to town the following morning. The duty on which he was sent was one no officer relished, and it should not have been thrust upon him, the junior of the regiment, nor would it have been had the colonel known whom the adjutant had detailed. The duty involved visiting groggeries, gambling hells and brothels in search of the missing men; being abused and insulted by slatternly women and bar-room loafers living like parasites for the time being on the bounty of the half-stupefied soldiers, yet Maynard wanted to get away from his engagement with Mrs. Turner. He wanted to think quietly as he rode townward at the head of his little detachment, with the yellow ambulance bringing up the rear, how or whether he could tell Miss Baird he was a witness, through his sense of hearing, at least, to what took place the night before; but he had by no means made up his mind when they entered the outskirts of Cheyenne, and riding briskly to a big stable-yard near the center of the town, left their horses there with one man in charge, and then, armed with their revolvers, started on their search. No good could come of asking questions. The populace of those days was always in league with the deserter or absentee without leave so long as he had money. Then not infrequently would they turn the poor fellow over

to the marshal or sheriff and get half the reward offered for the apprehension of soldier renegades. To load them drunk into a hack, turn them over at the guardhouse and claim the entire reward of thirty dollars per man would have been bad generalship. The hand of every soldier would have been against the traitor from that time on. They would have killed the goose that laid the golden egg. Maynard had an old sergeant with him who knew the ins and outs of every haunt of the bibulous among the boys in blue, and he led on, silent, relentless, unerring. Five minutes' brisk tramp brought them to a combination concert hall and gambling house. One or two loungers in front, at sight of the coming patrol, darted inside, and when the sergeant reached the glazed doors they were bolted. "Quick," he ordered the corporal, "take Schultz and Meyer and get around to the rear door. Nab every one of our fellows that comes out." Then he banged on the front door for admission.

But the "fellows" didn't come. It was full a minute before the sergeant's summons was answered. Then a head was poked out of an upper window, a head on a broad grin, and an oily, Milesian voice demanded, "What the devil is wanted? There's no game until to-night."

"The game we want is under this roof, Maloney, and you know it," was the sergeant's sturdy reply. "Now we don't mean to break in, neither can they break out. It's only a reasonable fine and a few days' fatigue duty they'll be getting for going back quietly with us now, but it'll be a dollar an hour for every hour we have to wait, and we can camp right here until they're starved out, if need be. So tell the gang to be wise and come at once."

By this time a little crowd had begun to gather. Maynard, silently awaiting the result of the sergeant's appeal, and trusting to his larger experience in such matters, was pondering over the legal aspect of the case and wondering whether Wyoming laws would be very savage at his expense in case he forced an entrance in search of his truant troopers, when he noticed that the glazed doors of a somewhat similar establishment across the way were swinging slowly open, and that a knot of curious and attentive spectators huddled close behind them, yet keeping within shelter and as much as possible out of sight, evidently desirous of escaping observation. Closer at hand the rapidly arriving populace began to indulge in chaff and facetious remarks, much to the annoyance of the sergeant and the comfort of the Irishman aloft, who, recognizing sympathetic souls in the crowd, stuck his

head still further out and exchanged jubilant greeting with cronies on the sidewalk.

"How much a head will ye give me, sergeant, for preserving their lives? Sure Hannifin's whisky across the way there would burn the stomach out of a brass monkey. It's rewarded heavily I ought to be. But I'm wastin' wurds wid you, sergeant. Let the liftenant spake. Sure he looks like a liberal, high-minded gentleman, which you don't, sergeant. Sure it's Mister Maynard I know, an' ye mustn't be givin' it away, boys; but it's him knows ivery room on the premises and wins his month's pay twice over at Scolly's table. Doan't ye now, liftenant?"

The street crowd shouted its approbation of this sally, and yelled with delight when Maloney was shoved to one side and another face, on a feminine head, was thrust beside that of the first occupant. It was fiery, or rather carroty red, while the eyes were bleary and the nose purple. Maloney was the chartered "bouncer" of the establishment and this his brawny helpmate. In the cosmopolitan make-up of the populace of Cheyenne of those days the Irish were scarce. Even John Chinaman was seldom to be seen. The crowd was typically frontier American, and gifted with all the American's passion for personal liberty and propensity for fun at any ex-

pense. Here was a squad of regulars, with a trig young West Pointer in command, seeking to compass the arrest of an equal number of renegade comrades, and balked in the attempt by the very fact that they represented the force and majesty of the federal government. Had the offender or offenders been guilty of any crime against the person or property of a fellow citizen of Cheyenne, they, the crowd, would have smashed in those fragile glazed doors and nabbed the culprits instanter; but as it was simply Uncle Sam who was wronged and defied, only their risibilities were appealed to. It was fun to contemplate the impotence of the armed force sent by the government to reclaim its own, provided it could be done without recourse to invasion of private property. Maloney's master's gambling hell was his castle, open to any citizen when its master chose, but forbidden to the law abiding at other times, and to Uncle Sam when he had no search warrant.

Then the crowd began to cheer Mrs. Maloney and call for a speech, and more of the populace arrived. The absurdity of the situation was patent to Maynard from the start, but the sergeant was fiery and wrathful. His little squad was being elbowed and crowded and encompassed round about, not in angry threat or abuse, but in jovial fashion. Mrs. Maloney,

nothing loath, had begun her harangue, and her voice had the carrying power of a rifle. Maynard saw the hopelessness of the situation and stepped to the sergeant's side. "Get your men together at once," he said, "we must pull out of this." The sergeant looked astonished, hesitated a moment, then said, "All right, sir, if you say so," and bustled round to the back door after the corporal. In silence the patrol then bored a way through the laughing, jeering, chaffing throng, and started up the street. "Where to, sir?" said the sergeant sulkily. He hated to retire, and had had no such schooling in respect to civil laws as had been pounded into his young superior at the Point.

"Back to the horses," was the answer. "We can accomplish nothing here."

But the crowd, like most Cheyenne assemblages in the days of old, had nothing in particular to do. It had been recruited from all the bar-rooms in the neighborhood, and desired to be amused, so it promptly resolved itself into an escort for the troopers, and traveled along after them a block or so. Then an inspiration seized several of its prominent constituents and a dozen of the number slipped away from the escorting party and ran rapidly down a side street, and two minutes later, as Maynard turned into the broad thoroughfare on

which opened the corral where they had left their horses with their single guardian, he was treated to a sensation. Confident of the applause of their fellow citizens, and reckless of law or order, a gang of the choicest spirits had dashed upon the enclosure, instantly overpowering the bewildered sentry; and while some stood guard over his prostrate form, the others unlinked the excited horses, threw themselves into saddle and, laughing and cheering, came clattering out into the street. This changed the whole situation in the twinkling of an eye. Taught to respect the rights and protect the property of other men, Maynard had very positive convictions for a youngster as to the sacred nature of the claims of Uncle Sam. So long as only chaff and ridicule were the weapons of the populace his equanimity had not been disturbed, but now he blazed with wrath. A yell of delight went up from some of the throng at sight of the motley troop ranging into line a hundred yards away, but, even then and there, were men who realized at once how wild and how serious a prank was this, and how widespread might be the havoc of its consequences. Instantly two or three men started for the young officer, shouting: "Don't notice it, lieutenant. Don't *do* anything. We'll get the horses."

Very possibly if Maynard had halted his party

then and there, or turned back and marched them into the adjoining street, the wiser among the citizens could have persuaded the offenders of the magnitude of their sin, and the horses would have been restored with rough, but profuse, frontier apologies. But the blood of the patrol was up. Here, at least, was something they had a right to resent, and all in an instant Maynard and his little party started on the jump for the despoilers. It was a bitter cold day, as has been said. The troopers were in heavy overcoats and shoes, fur caps and gloves, and they could not make a sprint despite their best efforts. It would have been easy enough for the riders to dash away, but all the devil of frontier fun, recklessness and whisky was at work, and clinging, as some of them had to do, to their plunging and excited steeds, down they came, following the lead of a jovial tough who had mounted Maynard's own horse. Luckily the leader had no spurs; luckily the horse seemed to recognize his master as the foremost of the familiar blue-coats, for despite the furious urging and kicking of the tall townsman on his back, "Rienzi" came snorting and plunging straight to Maynard's side, and the lieutenant, never laying hand upon the rein, was at the joker's stirrup in a second. Another second and both his sinewy hands had grasped the rider's boot and had toppled—

hurled him head foremost out of saddle to the icy ground. It was all done so quickly that no one realized what had happened until, as the other horses seemed instinctively to halt and cluster about their leader, and the other troopers to seize their mounts, and the momentary riders to tumble or throw themselves from their seats, it was seen that the ringleader of the gang lay prostrate as he had plunged, his head turned to one side and a dark stream of blood oozing from underneath.

Some one had set up a sympathetic cheer at Mayard's exploit. So long as all remained on the same footing, the crowd was a unit in its desire to have fun at the expense of the soldiers, but when its bolder spirits appeared in saddle they forfeited the full measure of the sympathy of a fickle populace, and Maynard's deft and skillful and marvelously quick settlement of the question won their admiration. All the same there was a prompt rush to aid and lift the prostrate man, a task none too easy, for he proved to be tall, very powerfully built, and utterly a dead weight on the hands of those who bore him. The blood was streaming from a jagged gash on the right side of the forehead, and it was evident at a glance that the contusion and shock had been severe. The rollicking mood of the crowd had suddenly changed, and as one man they flocked densely

about the central figure, Maynard, who, turning his horse over to the care of one of the troopers, and directing the sergeant to lead the patrol a little distance away, was now busy in the effort to revive his late tormentor.

"Does anybody know where he lives—who he is?" he inquired, as he knelt and began bathing away the blood with a sponge handed him by some sympathetic soul.

"He's only been here a few days, lieutenant," answered one of the throng, a stalwart fellow in a buffalo overcoat and wolfskin cap. "He's been playing at the Empire, where you were a few minutes ago, since Monday. First off he quit winner two or three times and treated liberal, but luck turned on him. I reckon he's about cleaned out. Didn't show up at the table last night at all."

Maynard looked up into the speaker's face. "Would you mind calling a doctor?" he said. "I'll pay his bill. Of course I'm sorry the man is so badly hurt, but——"

"Oh, you're all right, lieutenant. Nobody's going to blame you in the matter. We were all ripe for a little fun, but had no idea these fellows would be such damned fools as to try to steal your horses;" and here the fur-clad giant cast a disdainful glance at one or two of the would-be cavaliers,

the only ones of that luckless party to remain and hang shamefacedly about their late leader. "You fellows were eager enough to follow this man," said he, triumphing over the comments and questions hazarded by others in the crowd. "Don't you know his name?"

"Nuthin' more'n what he told me," sheepishly answered one of the two, with copious libation of tobacco juice and a shrug of his broad shoulders. "Said he'd been in the San Juan country—had made a stake mining and had been robbed of most of it in Denver by fellows who had run up here. There was a rooster with him two or three days ago who called him Boston, and he 'lowed that was the name he generally went by."

Somebody elbowed a way to the side of the victim and his amateur nurses, a glass of whisky in his hand—the one restorative almost sure to be obtainable on the frontier—and Maynard forced a few drops between his patient's teeth.

"That won't help, lieutenant," chuckled a bystander. "Nuthin' short of four fingers will begin to tell on his mucus. He's copper-lined, he is;" whereat the assemblage snickered. Maynard repeated the dose, and a fluttering sigh was the speedy response. The sponge was actively plied. More whisky was administered, this time with less diffi-

culty, and then the feeble hand sought to find the battered head, but fell back limply. "Open his shirt, lieutenant," suggested the man who knew him as "Boston," and the young officer's hand sought the heavy muffler that was twisted loosely about the neck. A coarse blue flannel shirt was revealed, was opened at the throat, and then a package in oiled silk, hanging by a silken cord, was found, and then came a doctor. Lifting an eyelid, he peeped into the dull pupil, felt the pulse, and placed his hand over the heart. "My office is only a few steps away. Lift him up and bring him there," said he, in the quiet, authoritative tone of the professional who had dwelt long among men, most of whose dead he had attended immediately before or after their sudden dissolution, and had seen them buried as they fell, with their boots on. The order was obeyed in silence. A shutter was lifted from its hinges at the nearest saloon, the patient was hoisted thereon, and the march began. Maynard stopped a moment.

"Leave Schultz here with my horse, sergeant, and go with the other men to gather what you can of the absentees. This has made a diversion in our favor. I'll join you at the Empire presently."

A discontented crowd hovered at the foot of the doctor's stairs. That level-headed personage had

ordered out everybody but Buffalo Coat and the man who knew the patient as Boston, but he opened to Maynard's knock. "Come in, lieutenant," he promptly said, as soon as he saw the face at the door. "You gave this big fellow a sharp lesson, but I fancy he deserved it. These gentlemen (here he winked sagely at the officer) have given me the particulars. No," he continued, "there's no fracture, no serious concussion. He'll come around presently. All that's likely to be necessary is a quiet room and complete rest for a few days. We have no public hospital as yet. The coroner's office ordinarily is all that is necessary."

"Will you kindly see that he gets every attention, doctor, and send the bill to me at the fort. My name's Maynard," said the officer. "Now I have to join my men, if I can be of no further use or service here," whereupon the two shook hands and parted.

Buffalo Coat followed to the door. "You're a damned good fellow, lieutenant," said he, "and I'm sorry the gang behaved as they did. It was the sergeant they were after, not you. He's all right, too, only he gets huffy when they guy, and that's nuts for the crowd. Now I'll let you in to the whereabouts of your strays. There was only one at the Empire, lying dead drunk in the back

room, but there's a raft of 'em across the road at Hannifin's, some in plain clothes. Their money's about given out and he'll be glad to get rid of 'em."

Maynard thanked the man rather coldly, and impatiently too, though he could hardly say why, mounted his horse, overtook the patrol a few blocks away, and imparted the tidings to his sergeant. Two minutes later they had dismounted again in a side street, molested and followed no longer, though the populace still hovered curiously about bar-room doors. The corporal with two men was sent through a back alley to the rear yard and doorway of Hannifin's place. Maynard and his party suddenly appeared at the invitingly open front, and with the tacit consent of the proprietor began their search of the premises, upstairs and down. From under beds and out of closets they dragged three of the absentees, then they invaded the cellar. Almost immediately there was a rush from a dark corner, a crash of boxes and barrels upon the resounding floor. The sergeant's lantern was shivered to bits. There followed a sound of blows, curses and struggles. Two dim figures bounded away up the steps, and Maynard, striving to follow, stumbled over a prostrate form, and then, suddenly conscious of a sharp pang in the side, found his searching hand deluged with his own blood and everything growing dim and dark about him.

Before he had finished bandaging patient number one, Dr. Corry was hurriedly summoned to Hannifin's by the report that Lieutenant Maynard had been stabbed to death.

There was a telegraph line from Cheyenne to the adjutant's office at Fort Russell in those days. Orderly call had just sounded and the adjutant was still at his work when in came the soldier operator with white, scared face. "Lieutenant," said he, "the town office says Loot'nant Maynard's stabbed through the heart trying to arrest deserters."

The colonel and Major Barry had been having a consultation about the probable movement of the battalion to the field, and were just coming forth into the hall. Both heard the abrupt announcement. Both started—the colonel into the adjutant's room—the major for his home.

"For God's sake keep it quiet as you can," were the latter's words, "at least until I've had time to break it to my wife."

CHAPTER IV.

A SPELL of dull weather had fallen on the fort. Except when a snowstorm was raging the Wyoming skies were generally clear and cloudless, and they had had earlier in the month a snowstorm fierce enough and long enough to render further specimens entirely unnecessary. The wind had taken a freak of blowing from the south for thirty-six hours, and the men were scurrying about without overcoats—the men of Stannard's battalion, that is, for, true to prediction, Barry had gone. Buxton and Freeman, Raymond and Turner, Gregg and Wayne, Truscott and Ray were the eight captains whose troops were quartered at Russell. Buxton was away on leave, but his troop was in Barry's battalion and so were Freeman's, Raymond's and Wayne's. There wasn't a woman whose husband had to go who did not think, down in the bottom of her heart, that it ought to have been the other battalion, or at least that if one had to go both should have gone, and most of them said so. To Mrs. Barry there was greater trial and hardship in the

separation from her devoted husband than to the wives of many of his juniors. But she was silent. Nathalie Baird alone knew what it meant to the invalid, and her own attentions would have been redoubled, but Mrs. Stannard had promptly appeared to beg that she might take the major's place at the afternoon readings, and Mrs. Ray and Mrs. Atherton, the colonel's wife, had been almost equally insistent, and other ladies had called to know if there wasn't something they could do—even Mrs. Turner who never read anything. And they all had so much to say about "dear Mr. Maynard," and what a shocking thing it was, and how dreadful to have to wire to his home people that he was so seriously wounded. His mother, it appears, was dead, his father old and too feeble to undertake the long journey, but his sister was already on the way. He still lay in a room at the Inter Ocean in town, too severely injured and too weak to be moved. There was fear of fever, possibly of blood poisoning, so said the savants, and his friends at the fort could only submit.

Atherton was an angry man when told all that had transpired in town. He came down, said the troopers, like a thousand of brick on the fellows brought back by the patrol, had caused rewards to be offered for the two still at large, one of whom at

least had been guilty of stabbing the lieutenant. Maynard and his men, coming from the brightly lighted saloon into the dark cellar, could see nothing. The two skulkers, whose eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, and who were aided by the broad streak of light from the trap in the saloon floor, had plainly seen the searchers as they descended, had made their bold rush for freedom, and easily escaped. But this they could have done without bloodshed, and even those who had been their friends at the fort would none of them now. The stabbing of young Mr. Maynard was absolutely without justification, even by men who had prison staring them in the face. They were crazed by protracted drinking, was the only explanation, but it was nothing more than explanation—it was no excuse. Ever since the end of September the previous year the young officer had been steadily on duty with his troop. It takes much less than five months for veteran soldiers to take the measure of, or, as they express it, "size up" an officer, and Maynard was thoroughly well liked by the men of the entire command. Only those black sheep of the fold, the irreconcilable toughs who are to be found to the number of two or three in almost every garrison, could find it in their hearts to say aught against him. As luck would have it, the two de-

serters still at large were characters of this type—blackguards incarnate, who had served, doubtless, under other names in more than one company until the loose recruiting methods of that day had landed them in Buxton's troop. Here, so long as the burly captain was on duty, they had no bad time. Buxton had a peculiar affiliation for the tough element of the rank and file, possibly because he had spent some years before the war as one of them. But Buxton had gone on leave, and his first lieutenant was giving the troop a needed straightening out, a process that involved privates Yell and Culligan in disciplinary methods hitherto untried, and led to their determination to sever, for the third or fourth time, probably, the bonds that welded them to Uncle Sam. No vestige of doubt remained that these ruffians, or one of them at least, had dealt Maynard the well-nigh fatal blow; and, had the garrison had its say, all Fort Russell would have joined in the search and pursuit, and a short shrift and sudden cord would have been the lot of both.

And so it happened that Nathalie Baird found herself sorely missing the sight of that dashing rider, and the sound of his cheery, ringing voice as she took her afternoon exercise on the prairie, and could not help thinking a great deal about him, and feeling very, very full of interest and pity, and not a

little desire to be of some use to him in his critical state. She could not help wishing it was the proper—the obvious thing for young girls like herself to become the nurses and caretakers of warriors wounded in the line of duty. They did such things in romance and fiction, but Nathalie had never read Ivanhoe and the host of stories that blessed their hero with such sweet companionship and care. She found herself wondering very much what Mr. Maynard's sister would be like, and wishing she knew and could go to see her; and ruminating over all these things, Nathalie's step was slower, her eyes downcast, and her round, soft cheek lost the lively flush that buoyant health and exercise had given it. There were still some young fellows left in the garrison, though both Dana and Hunter had gone with the field column, the latter in Maynard's place in Wayne's troop, but something told them the tall girl at the Barrys would rather be alone just now, and noting her pallor and the wistful, anxious look with which the blue eyes regarded everybody who had just come out from town, garrison gossips began to talk, especially Mrs. Turner.

Then Maynard's sister reached Cheyenne, was met at the train by Major and Mrs. Stannard and the adjutant, and escorted at once to her brother's bedside at the hotel, where a communicating room

had been made ready for her. She proved to be older than the sufferer by several years, and a woman whom grief, anxiety and care had told upon before her thirtieth year. She was a trifle cold and undemonstrative, too, thought the trio who met and welcomed her, but every allowance was made.

"Some of us will be in every day until Mr. Maynard is well enough to be moved," said Mrs. Stannard, "so you must be sure to let us know of anything that you or he may need; and when you do come to Russell we have spare rooms in our big quarters, and you're to come right there, both of you." Miss Maynard had no idea how kind this was of Mrs. Stannard. She did not realize that her brother had only a single room under a roof that could barely cover an ordinary parlor, yet that had to shelter the abodes of three bachelor subalterns—two beside himself. But Miss Maynard was very, very glad to go to the Stannards when, five days later, the doctors and nurses lifted her soldier boy into the yellow ambulance, trundled him slowly out to the fort, and then bore him upstairs into the major's front room. April had come by that time and a warm south wind, as has been said, played for several days, and the skies were murky, the air soft and unusually humid, and Maynard was presently allowed to sit propped up in bed, while Grace,

his adoring sister, read to or chatted with him, and the doctors let him see occasional visitors. Mrs. Stannard was there by the hour, and the stern colonel had called and had been most kind and thoughtful, and, so far from finding fault, had praised Maynard's conduct, and still the patient was not happy.

One day after long silence he turned suddenly. "Grace, what ladies have called to see you?"

"Why, all of them, I suppose, Ronald—ever so many anyway."

"Not all, because Mrs. Barry cannot leave her room, I am told," said he.

"No, very true; but she sent her card and explained it all—Miss Baird brought it."

"When was she here?" demanded the brother eagerly.

"Day before yesterday and again to-day, bringing some delicious jelly Mrs. Stannard is going to give you by and by." And then the sister saw the joy-light burning in his eyes, and the faint flush that was mounting to his cheek, and her face took on an instant shade of gray. "Why, Ronald," she said "do you know her well? You like her?"

Then she could ask no more, for all at once there sprang up in her heart the question, "What will this mean to Gertrude Bonner?"

Rising presently and without a word, the sister slowly left the room and returned to her own. Stopping for a moment to bathe her temples in cold water, she then stepped to the dormer window looking out over the bleak, northward prairie, and pressed her forehead upon the cool pane. She had had her own sorrows, poor girl. Her own love had left her after a brief, joyous furlough when she was but eighteen, and rejoined his regiment just in time for Five Forks. He had fought gallantly in earlier engagements; had won promotion, and come home sorely wounded to be wooed back to health and strength among the kindly people of their Mohawk village; had returned to duty for the last campaign full of hope, happiness, love of country, and of her, and the brief glory of that campaign was indeed his last. The joy of the news of Lee's surrender was stifled throughout the narrowing valley at Little Falls by the telegram that briefly told them Captain Ralph Bonner was mortally wounded at Sailor's Creek. Grace Maynard's life from that time on was taken up in devotion to her own mother and to his, and when they, too, were called from earth she had still left to nurse, her aging father, himself a wounded veteran of the war, and to rear and love were her boy brother

Ronald and "his" girl sister Gertrude. The father's one ambition was for his son—that he might be educated at West Point and commissioned in the army. The sister's main hope had been that when Ronald came back to them, an officer, he might look with loving eyes upon the shy little village girl, who as laughing, romping maiden had been the playmate and tease of his early boyhood. He had looked kindly, even affectionately upon her, but with the same serene fondness with which he regarded his sister, and then had gone on his way, after weeks of long talk and counsel with the father, to join his regiment in far Wyoming.

In every letter Grace had written there was mention of Gertrude, how lovely she had grown, how good and devoted she was to father, how helpful and attentive to him, "and then always so eager to hear about you," and now was all her planning to go for naught? Was it possible that her hero brother, who had been her care as well as pride for years, now that he was free to choose would turn from the fond and faithful little heart that was beating for him there at home and dower this unknown New England girl with the wealth of his first love? At the first meeting Grace had noted her beauty, the radiant color that so quickly came and went and came again, but other women had

entered upon their interview, and Miss Baird had presently retired. The second time she came Mrs. Stannard was there, and several callers, and Grace had had but few words with her shy visitor, but never had she thought of *this* as a possibility. They spoke of her as Mrs. Barry's companion, a very retiring, not to say repellent young person, who was so painfully diffident and austere that few of their number had grown to know her at all. Some believed her to be a sort of ward of Mrs. Barry's, though that was denied. The subject had had little interest before; now it became imbued with a something stronger than fascination. Grace Maynard felt that she could not too soon learn all that was to be learned of this dangerous girl, and even as she stood and planned and pondered, out over the open prairie, picking her way among the little pools and rapidly dwindling drifts, stooping in places as though to pluck the tiny white flowerets that dotted the surface with the first soft sunshine and southerly breeze, there strolled Nathalie Baird. She had just emerged from behind the brown bulk of the old hospital. She was well-nigh four hundred yards away, but Grace Maynard knew her at a glance and watched her—watched and studied and marked her every move until she was a mere speck far out toward the foothills, and then, when at last the

watcher would have turned away, that speck suddenly became two.

Mrs. Stannard, busy about her household duties a moment later heard Miss Maynard hurrying downstairs, and was surprised to see her running up again with the major's field glasses in her hand.

"Is anything wanted? Can I help you in any way?" she called.

But there was no answer.

CHAPTER V.

That evening Mrs. Turner, with her chum, Mrs Raymond, "hunting in couples" as of old, came to call again at the Stannards, prepared to be civil to Mr. Maynard's sister. With Maynard confined to his bed, and most of the other young men off with Barry on a winter campaign, time was hanging heavily on Mrs. Turner's hands, and one thing she could not do was sit at home alone, even, as she said, "when the captain was there." The Stannards' little parlor was bright and cheerful, but the master of the house was over at the colonel's just then, talking of the probabilities of Barry's needing help, and growling not a little that he was held in leash when he longed to be on the war path. Whether the Cheyennes had heard of the preparations to head them off, and were heeding them, no officer could say. At all events the threatened outbreak had not come to pass, but the troops from Leavenworth and Riley were rapidly closing on the reservation, while, farther to the north, squadrons from McPherson and Russell had been sent to the field.

Mrs. Stannard came in to greet her guests, blithe and smiling, and presently Miss Maynard was heard descending the stairs. She entered, looking as prim and impassive as ever, yet fancying she was receiving the visitors with all cordiality. These latter began, at once, of course, with inquiries for the invalid, accompanying them with every assurance of sympathetic interest, and Miss Maynard was pleased to say that he had had a very comfortable day and had vastly enjoyed the warm tea Mrs. Stannard had made for him half an hour since. To refer to it or to any edible or potable as hot would have been a crass violation of Miss Maynard's tenets as to what was delicate and refined in speech. She experienced something akin to a shock on hearing an officer of the regular army, her burly host, importune his smiling wife to order more hot buckwheats, for village ethics in this behalf, first applied by imported schoolma'ams to purely personal conditions—as when they gently rebuked the maidens running in from the game of tag at recess and saying "I'm so hot"—had gradually extended to a provincial embargo against the adjective on any terms. All the same "warm" meant "hot" when applied to toast and tea, and Mrs. Turner took the word, as say the French, and bustled briskly into conversation.

"Ah, yes, we all know how good Mrs. Stannard's tea is. My cook never can get it like hers, but just as soon as Mr. Maynard's able to eat anything I'll be too happy to bring him some dainties myself. Does he like jelly?"

"Very much," answered Miss Maynard, with a somewhat astringent smile. "His appetite is coming back and he wants to eat everything." But she made no mention of the jelly he had eaten and rejoiced in only an hour before, far more than he did Mrs. Stannard's tea, so it was the latter who spoke.

"Miss Baird brought him some delicious jelly this afternoon," she announced, "and it was good to see how he enjoyed it."

"Yes, but it was Mrs. Barry not Miss Baird who was the donor," quickly interposed Miss Maynard. "Miss Baird was merely the bearer, though I am sure she was very kind, and I am very grateful to her."

It was impossible that such veteran society women as their visitors should not note the almost intense eagerness with which Miss Maynard seemed to desire to impress them with her theory that Miss Baird was in nowise connected with the preparation of the jelly for her invalid brother. A quick glance was exchanged, but no comment made; indeed there

was no time, for the major's voice and step were heard at the door as he came noisily into the hall, ushering the adjutant and a subaltern or two who had come to inquire for Maynard and to pay their respects to the ladies. They flocked into the little army parlor with the easy confidence of comrades sure of welcome, and dropped into seats wherever they could find them, even the piano stool bearing its share, and the chat and laughter rippled on—Miss Maynard speedily relapsing into silence and study of the faces about her with deep interest, yet with the same impassive, almost solemn visage—old Stannard beaming on the party from the doorway where he stood in his habitual off-duty attitude, hands deep in trousers' pockets and legs straddled apart as though long years in saddle had rendered it impossible to lounge in any other pose. Presently he turned and tiptoed up the narrow stairway, saying he'd go and have a peep at Maynard, who was reported half awake, half dozing, and pretending to read.

"Queer we don't hear a word from Barry," said one of the younger officers, flushing a bit as he caught the adjutant's baleful eye glowering at him for the omission of Barry's title at the hands of one so many years his junior. "We dropped in there," he plunged ahead, in nervous effort to cover the

solecism, "hoping to get some news, but Mrs. Barry hadn't had a line for two days."

"Did you see her, Mr. Graham?" queried Mrs. Stannard, "or did Miss Baird receive you?"

"We saw her. She was lying on her couch before the parlor fire. Mrs. Ray was with her. We didn't see Miss Baird." And then young Graham became suddenly aware that the other three women had not only discontinued chat, but were listening to him and not to the other men. It embarrassed him still the more. "She wasn't feeling very well, Mrs. Barry said. She came home from her walk rather later than usual and had to go to her room."

"I hope Miss Baird is not going to be ill," said Mrs. Stannard anxiously. "She has been looking a little pale of late," and Mrs. Stannard did not see how intently Miss Maynard was eying her as she spoke.

"Oh, I didn't understand that anything serious was the matter, only she didn't come down to tea, and Mrs. Ray was taking her place temporarily."

There was a moment's silence. Every one present except Miss Maynard was aware of her brother's manifest devotion to Nathalie Baird for two weeks previous to his serious adventure in town, and each and every one was wondering how much the young girl's indisposition might be due to anxiety on his account. Mrs. Turner was the first to speak:

"How very queer that she should be ill, don't you think so?" she queried, true to her practice of committing her hearer to some expression indicative of support of—Mrs. Turner's views and opinions.

"Very queer," murmured Mrs. Raymond, glancing furtively at Miss Maynard, whose face, pale and patient, still gave no sign.

"Oh, I—I don't suppose it's anything serious," interposed Lieutenant Walker; "I met her near the gate as she was coming in. She seemed in a hurry, and I thought she looked more as she used to when I first saw her up at Winthrop when I was there on court-martial duty. She was looking mighty pretty last week, but seems to have kind of broken up recently. She hardly noticed me at all when she went by."

"Why, how strange," said Mrs. Turner. "Well, we *must* be going. We've been here long enough to make you all think we'd come to spend the night. Miss Maynard," she continued, rising and turning a deaf ear to Mrs. Stannard's polite expostulations and assurances that they had been in the house barely ten minutes, "do come and see me as soon as you're able to run about. I declare I don't see anybody nowadays, and we all miss Mr. Maynard so."

To which Mrs. Raymond murmured a purring

second, and then after various other farewells, and at the close of five minutes devoted to these leave-takings, the two ladies made their exit, declining for a wonder the escort of any of the gallants present. Once outside, and the door closed, Mrs. Turner turned to her companion:

"Do you think we can venture in? It isn't nine yet. We can say we came to help, as we'd heard Miss Baird was ill, you know."

Mrs. Raymond hesitated. "I haven't been there, except to call formally, since the day she came. I'm afraid it would be too—thin."

But Mrs. Turner was a leader of women when they wanted to be led, and her motion prevailed. Mrs. Barry on her sofa and Mrs. Ray bending over her, were in earnest conversation when the two were ushered in.

And this was how it happened that Mrs. Turner herself should be the bearer of an important and exciting piece of news back to the Stannards' parlor not fifteen minutes later. She came rushing in without even stopping to ring.

"What do you think," she cried. "Colonel Atherton's got a despatch from headquarters and another from Major Barry. The Indians have broken loose. The whole command may have to go. He came to see her right after they reached

him and he's going over to the office now. *You'll* all be wanted," she continued, with a comprehensive glance at the boys. The adjutant edged at once to the door. Stannard's footfalls were heard overhead as he left Maynard's bedside and hastened to the stairs.

"What's that? What's the news?" he cried, as he came hurriedly down, and again Mrs. Turner had the comfort of holding the floor and the absorbed attention of her auditors for half a minute, and then, loud, ringing, and imperative, the cavalry trumpet out upon the parade broke up the gathering with the stirring summons of "Officers' Call." Only the women were left to discuss the situation, and Miss Maynard for the moment forgot her vivid interest in all that had been said or implied regarding Nathalie Baird in this her first experience with sudden orders for the field—an old-time and all too familiar episode in garrison life as it was led a score of years ago.

That night the lanterns were dancing about the barracks and quarters long after the usual hour for "taps," and the officers and men of Stannard's battallion were busily at work packing and preparing for the campaign. The special trains ordered to transport them to North Platte, far to the east, from which point they could most easily reach the old

trail of the Cheyennes when traveling between the northern and southern villages of the tribe, were to be in readiness with the dawn of the coming day, and many a man, many a woman knew no wink of sleep the live-long hours that intervened. And yet Mrs. Stannard had found time, in the midst of all she had to do for her major's mess-chest, to run over to see that Mrs. Barry lacked no comfort. Mrs. Ray, of course, had had to hasten home; but Miss Baird was on duty with her invalid again—silent, helpful, thoughtful as ever, yet seeming, as Mrs. Stannard could not help but see, very far from well. There was a strange, hopeless, harassed, appealing look about the eyes, that were but recently so placidly blue and tender, that the loving-hearted army woman was touched and troubled to see. She was the one woman in the —th in those days to whom all the youngsters confided their troubles, hopes, or fears. She was the repository of the cherished secrets of half the garrison—of men and women both. She was the object of the sublime envy of other officers' wives, because of the implicit trust placed in her silence and discretion, and the unbounded respect felt for her opinion. She had been arbitrator in many a family difference in the old days, but of late years had declined to serve—the climate of Arizona, where the —th had spent four

years before returning to the plains, having proved far too arid and peppery, and therefore so temper-trying that even her mediation had been occasionally rejected. But envy her as they might, and deplore the partiality and bad judgment of the young officers as they might, the other matrons of the regiment could not help loving and admiring Mrs. Stannard, and all this Miss Baird had heard in one form or another time and again.

Was it fancy, then? thought Mrs. Stannard, as she sat by the invalid's bedside. Was she mistaken in thinking that every little while, as Nathalie flitted about the room, she caught the girl's eyes seeking hers with such a look of distress and appeal in their blue depths that it filled her with longing to take the motherless child to her heart and bid her pour out the torrent of her sorrows, and find at least sympathy and comfort, if not immediate relief.

And yet Nathalie fled when Mrs. Stannard's swimming eyes betrayed the depths of her interest as she rose to go.

"We shall both be widowed for the time being," she said, as she bent over Mrs. Barry's pillow, "and I hope you will let me come in every day and read to you. I fear Miss Baird isn't quite as strong as we could wish. She looks very fragile to-night."

For answer Mrs. Barry first placed her finger on

her lips, then by an inquiring glance seemed to say, "Is she gone?" and then aloud, "Would you mind closing the door?"

Softly Mrs. Stannard stepped thither, glanced into the adjoining room and saw that it was empty, shut the door and came back to the bedside. Mrs. Barry took her visitor's hand. "Mrs. Stannard," said she, "like everybody else in the regiment, I come to you when troubled, and I'm sorely troubled about Nathalie. You know, do you not, how I came to find her? No? Well, I haven't told it as a rule. Her father had served on the same division staff with Major Barry during the war, and a strong friendship grew up between them. When Captain Baird was killed, his brother-in-law came all the way to Virginia after his body, and Major Barry was allowed to go with it as far as Washington, and there he met this gentleman, Nathalie's uncle by marriage. He impressed Major Barry as being a sturdy, warm-hearted fellow who would do all he could for the widow and orphan, especially for this little girl who was named, as Nathalie has only recently told me, for his own wife. I wondered how she came by that name, but it seems that this was Mrs. Baird's younger and favorite sister. Already, however, this gentleman had four children of his own, and could not well provide for more. A

desultory correspondence was kept up for awhile and then it dropped off, but in 1876 this Mr. Williams wrote that his niece was practically destitute, that his own business was completely ruined, and he begged us to do something for her, saying that she was a good, pure-minded, lovely girl, and intimating that he would have been only too thankful had heaven blessed him with such children.

So the major went there when East on leave, and she has been with us for a year now, and she *is* lovely and *was* content and happy until just a few days ago. I watched her narrowly at the time of Mr. Maynard's mishap, half expecting her to be greatly shocked and distressed. Shocked she was, and measurably distressed, but not to the extent I had expected. This change in her has not come through him. She has suddenly met some serious mental strain, and it is the more trying because she cannot tell or will not tell what it is. She begs me not to ask any more, but sometimes," and here Mrs. Barry looked appealingly up into the gentle face of her friend, "sometimes I feel sure she would confide in you, and you could help her. Will you?"

"Indeed I will if she will let me," was the warm-hearted reply. "Now I must get back to Major Stannard or he'll be seeking for me and saying

dreadful things in Apache. To-morrow morning I'll come to you again."

An hour later Nathalie Baird, kneeling by the bedside of her friend and protector, gazed long and earnestly into the placid face, bent her ear to listen to the gentle, measured breathing as though to assure herself that the sleep was sound; then slowly, cautiously, noiselessly rose to her feet, extinguished the lamp, and set the night light on the floor, slipped into the dimly lighted front room, and thence to the hall. There, taking a hooded cloak from a peg, she as noiselessly opened the front door, peered up and down the row, noted the flitting lights at the barracks, and the sound of busy preparation, hastily withdrew a moment as an officer's orderly, blanket and robe-laden, came laboring down the line, then, once more glancing out, stepped softly forth upon the piazza and, huddling within the warm folds of her cloak, tiptoed around the corner of the house and through the dark passage leading to the spacious yard that lay to the north. The servants had long since retired to their little rooms in the annex at the rear, but the girl trembled as she passed their windows, yet pressed resolutely on, and presently, clearing the wooden buildings, was swallowed up in the blackness of the cloud-covered night.

CHAPTER VI.

Mrs. Raymond was growing jealous. For years, despite those occasional tiffs and spats with which feminine intimacies are so frequently diversified, she had been Fanny Turner's closest friend. There had been occasions in the lives of both when neither had spoken to the other for as much as forty-eight hours, and when neither believed it possible for her ever to speak to the other again. In this suspension of diplomatic and personal relations, however, no embargo existed as to language descriptive of each other's faults, foibles or falsifications. What the two ladies failed to say *to* was more than compensated by what they said *of* each other. Notwithstanding which disturbance of the atmospheric conditions in the fair sky of their friendship, the intimacy lived and throve—was even strengthened if not purified by the brief flashings of such summer lightnings and the reverberations of vocal thunder. Indeed it would be hard to say where in all the —th either lady could have found an intimate save in the other, for the maids and matrons then com-

posing the social element of the regiment had learned wisdom in their generation—were under the influence and guidance of such pure spirits as Mrs. Stannard, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Freeman, and Mrs. Ray, so that even domestic and social terrors like Mrs. Wilkins had been tamed into a certain fealty to the new creed expounded by them, and many a man, many a woman, had remarked that "the —th was a mighty different regiment from what it used to be in the days of Lady Pelham and Arizona."

It was a better regiment in every way, much as they had all loved "Old Catnip," as they called the colonel who led them in the days of their exile, but who, lucklessly, was too often and disastrously led by his wife. The new commander, like the modern Tommy Atkins, was "every inch a soldier and every inch a man," and though Mrs. Atherton loved a cozy chat with her cronies as much as any woman alive, she had lived and moved and had her being in wider social circles too long not to have learned the golden rule of silence. Several objectionables had been eliminated in the course of years, some by transfer to other arms of the service, be it understood, one or two to other spheres, and still Buxton lingered among the men and Mrs. Turner among the women, and if ever there lived a lady blessed with unbounded confidence in the infallibil-

ity of her opinions and the unerring rectitude of her intentions, it was that same Mrs. Frances Turner.

Other women there were, of course, to circulate her views; but in bold, inspiring originality of conception there was none to equal her. Mrs. Turner might not be alone as a disburser of regimental gossip, but, as Lieutenant Blake was heard to say, she could start more in a minute than could be stopped in a month.

And now Mrs. Raymond was actually disturbed and jealous because of a new, sudden and mysterious intimacy that had sprung up between the friend of her bosom and the hitherto impassive and unapproachable Miss Maynard. From meeting only formally and semi-occasionally there had developed an unlooked for and apparently unquenchable desire for each other's company, and where Mrs. Turner used to be dropping in on Mrs. Raymond any morning after her toilet was completed for the day, she had taken to bustling by *en route* to Mrs. Stannard's, never so much as stopping at the Raymonds to explain the meaning of her haste; and there in Mrs. Stannard's parlor, or in solemn promenade along the walk, did Mrs. Turner and her new-found friend spend hours in close and confidential communion, the object of which was a mystery to Mrs. Raymond, not to mention the rest of Russell.

Meantime Lieutenant Maynard was mending fast and needing little nursing. Therefore was his sister at liberty to seek more and more the stimulant and exhilaration of the open air. Therefore, too, was it suggested by Mrs. Raymond that the necessity of her remaining a burden on her brother and the Stannards no longer existed. Stannard and his stanch battalion had gone. The populace of Russell was now made up mainly of the temporarily widowed and fatherless, the invalids and the band. A small squad had been left from each troop to take care of the stables, quarters and corrals, and from these the post quartermaster detailed night watchmen to patrol the garrison pending the coming of an infantry company. The colonel and adjutant, too, had taken the field one train ahead of Stannard's. Mrs. Atherton had gone in to visit relatives in Chicago, and, when they could laugh at all, the ladies were asking each other which of their elders was really in temporary command of the camp, or did the surgeon, chaplain and quartermaster deserve consideration.

Meantime poor Maynard was fuming and fretting in his pretty room, devotedly nursed, carefully attended and prescribed for, but with every day becoming more irascible and unreasonable. It was his first year with the regiment, be it remembered,

and the idea that it should be on the warpath and he mewling in bed, was intolerable. Yet the doctor gravely told him he could not ride without certainty of reopening his wound and endangering his life. Maynard could not believe it. Both Mrs. Stannard and his sister strove to read to him, but he would not listen. He wanted all the papers that had news of the field columns, but no other subject in their pages interested him in the least. There was one subject much nearer home to which he would have given ear with more than avidity, but on this subject he could not talk, and Mrs. Stannard and his sister would not talk to him. He longed for daily news of Nathalie Baird, and got none. She had even ceased her visits to the house.

Ever since the night of her first apparent illness —the night that orders came for Stannard's men to move, she had been drooping visibly, and Mrs. Barry was sore distressed. No more did Nathalie take her long, exhilarating walks upon the open prairie. She stole forth on sunshiny days at Mrs. Barry's urging, and went timidly up and down the long walk within the sentry lines, but never neared the gate at the east or the open roadway that passed out to the westward beyond the old headquarters building. She seemed to shrink from observation even then. She seemed reluctant to meet or talk with

the many kind and sympathetic women who would have welcomed her to their firesides when the swift gales burst upon them from the mountain pass to the northwest, or to their sunshiny piazzas on the rare afternoons when soft breezes blew from the Colorado foothills, and the band played sweet melodies, and the children frolicked merrily out on the broad level of the parade. Shy she had ever seemed to be, but not startled and afraid as now, and Mrs. Stannard, generally self-contained and self-reliant, had even taken counsel with Mesdames Ray and Truscott, two young matrons she much approved of, and invoked their aid in the good work of banishing the evil spirit that had darkened the day-dreams of this strange New England girl. Both were ready and willing to help in any way, yet neither could suggest a line of operation. The girl seemed so utterly unapproachable. Mrs. Truscott had paraded Baby Jack for Miss Baird's inspection, and expected her to become a slave to that conquering hero's fascinations as did other women, old and young, but Miss Baird had passed his little highness by with scant recognition the very next time she met him, and an injured and indignant nurse was not slow to take the tidings home. Mrs. Ray had bidden her to luncheon or tea, or both, always with the same result. Nathalie could not leave, she said, her in-

valid at home except for the walk she took each day. Mrs. Stannard had sought, gently and kindly, to win the confidence of the girl, but Nathalie seemed to divine her object and fled from her in nervous alarm. "It is a most uncanny thing," said Mrs. Stannard to Nathalie's friend and protector. "I never met a girl of her years so utterly set against her kind." There was a lovely young girl often visiting at the Freemans then—a Miss Nannie Bryan, who was freshness, vivacity and frankness personified, and these schemers sought to induce her to cultivate Miss Baird, but that fell through, for Nan's outspoken, open-hearted manner seemed to be a reproach in Nathalie's eyes—she who would not or could not confide in anybody.

"She is the loneliest girl in Wyoming," said Mrs. Barry, despairingly, to a friend, one sunny afternoon. "Ah, well," was the reassuring reply, "Mr. Maynard is to be allowed to sit up in the sunshine presently, and then you'll see how soon she flutters to his side."

And they did see. She came out from the Barrys for her customary exercise one brilliant afternoon, and there he sat reclining in an easy-chair, well wrapped up in overcoat, robes and blankets, and he caught instant glimpse of her, and his eyes flashed their signal of joy and recognition, his pale cheek

mounted its radiant color in honor of her coming, but she went pale as a lily, and, turning hurriedly, snapped the gate behind her, and with obstinately averted head hastened away down the row. It was impossible for his sister not to see the depth and bitterness of his disappointment and chagrin. She determined that the hour for her to speak and to speak plainly was now at hand, so relentlessly she began. There are women who choose the time when a fellow is down, a helpless invalid, to tell him, in extenso, the worst news, perhaps, that could be brought to his ears. At the moment when he should be free from new or grievous distress, they load upon him, then and there, the latest rumors or reports that can be relied upon to bring him infinite anxiety and concern. Not that they wish to see him suffer, but because the temptation to tell direful tidings is so uncontrollable. Then, again, when he is up and well and able to dodge away, she may not so easily reach his ear. Whatever be the reasoning, Miss Maynard felt that the time for her to speak had come, and speak she did.

"Ronald," she began, "do you care—already—for that girl?"

And Ronald, without speaking, answered.

Whereupon Miss Maynard, in tones of deep dismay, ejaculated, "Oh, Ronald!" and lapsed into a

silence indicative of unspeakable woe, leaving him no alternative but to demand the reason for her strangely significant conduct. No little urging accomplished the object. It required strong persuasion, apparently, to induce the woman to tell what she knew, or believed she knew, concerning Nathalie Baird, but when once the ice was broken there was no stint to the current of her accusations.

If gave her infinite pain, she declared, to have to say one word against a girl who was orphaned, homeless and, but for Mrs. Barry, practically friendless, but duty to her brother and the good name their father had given them prompted her to the task. Shy and pure and innocent as Miss Baird might look, there was a cloud over her name and character. She was carrying on a clandestine correspondence and holding secret meetings in the dead of night with a man, a total stranger to the garrison.

For a moment Maynard could not speak. His face, pallid through illness and suffering, took on a shade of gray that intensified its ghastly hue. His sister looked upon him in astonishment and in fright. "Ronald!" she cried, "I did not know—I did not dream it could mean so much to you."

"It doesn't mean," he interrupted, finding husky voice at last. Then each word seemed to come like the crack of a whip—sharp, snapping, a tone that

never in his life had she heard from his lips before. "It doesn't mean, for I don't believe a damned word of it."

Shocked and stunned, the woman was for the moment silenced. Never since childhood days had he braved her. Taught by his soldier father the most scrupulous courtesy and gentleness to woman in general, his mother and elder sister in particular; punished promptly if in boyish temper he raised hand or voice against either, he had passed from the jurisdiction of that mother to that of the sister as unopposing as though her sway for all time were unquestioned, and Grace, womanlike, had accepted his submission as her just due; had found him yielding as ever to her dominion when he returned to her on cadet furlough, and hardly less so when, with broadened shoulders and in stalwart manhood and bristling mustache, the young graduate came once more to the peaceful Mohawk village before joining his regiment in the far West. She had looked upon him as her own, to guide and mold and direct as she had guided and directed his toddling footsteps. She had never known him to oppose his will—his plans—to hers. She recalled how when, only three weeks before it was time for him to start for Wyoming, he came in all eagerness one day to say that Wharton, Ives and Draper, of his class, were to

sport their new uniforms for the first time at the "Twenty-eighth Hop"* at West Point, and had written for him to join them, and he was wild to go, she had glanced at Gertrude Bonner sitting patiently in the vine-shaded porch of the old homestead, and bade him hold his reply until she could have opportunity to speak with him alone. How submissively, how affectionately, he had yielded to her brief argument; how entirely he seemed to be swayed by her wish; how utterly for years had the brother been her vassal—"hers to command" indeed—how indefinitely might she not have counted on the continuance of her queendom had not another woman stepped upon the threshold of her throne. Not only to her, to the sister who had been his guide and guardian, lo these many years, did he owe allegiance now, but in the jealous love of power and possession burning in the woman's breast, she had come to regard it as her right to say to whom her princeling should tender, when the time came, the heart and hand that she had held in fancy as only hers to bestow.

And he had dared to look with eyes of love upon another, and now had dared to say to her that not one word would he believe of her aspersion of the

* The ball given by the cadets on the 28th of August, annually.

girl he loved. It stung her to quick resentment, to one supreme effort to regain her old ascendancy. Far down the row toward the east front the slender form of the fair young girl could be seen. She had well-nigh reached the end of the walk. It was too early for the band, too soon after the midday meal for the ladies to appear upon the piazzas. Only a few children were chasing about the gray-green carpet of the parade; only a few nursemaids and baby carriages were visible, lazily trundling along the sunlit path. Not a man was in sight about the great quadrangle. The barracks were silent and deserted. The guard maintained over the few general prisoners had been drawn within the wooden prison. Grace Maynard was alone with her brother, weakened as he was by wounds and suffering and mental worry, and it might be her last opportunity.

"Ronald," she exclaimed, in tragic resumption of the old, almost forgotten tone of mingled amaze, distress and horror with which erring little boys are made to vaguely realize that they have been guilty of some unpardonable crime, "Ronald, you never, never would have dared to say such words to me were our father still alive."

"Grace," he answered, with fire burning in his deep eyes, "you would never have dared to speak so of such a girl in his presence, and I'll never listen to it from you or any one again."

She had sprung to her feet, barely listening to him now, and was gazing with dilated eyes in the direction the girl had taken.

"You won't listen," she cried, in tones of mingled wrath and triumph. "You won't believe the sister who loves and would stand between you and deceit. Well, then—look!"

And, looking as she pointed, Ronald Maynard saw that a tall man in civilian dress had suddenly issued from behind the last house on the row, and was bending eagerly, closely over the drooping head of Nathalie Baird.

CHAPTER VII.

"NATHALIE, dear," said Mrs. Barry, looking up from her sofa a day or two later, "it is high time you were indulging in a new gown and a spring hat. Why don't you drive to town with Mrs. Freeman one of these warm afternoons. She'd only be too glad to take you and help you, and you'll be surprised to see what pretty things you can get or have made here in Cheyenne."

"The girl's color, ever betraying, came and went, leaving her even paler than before. She turned away as though searching for a book and for a moment made no reply.

"I know how self-denying you are, Nathalie, but think, dear, a young girl like you should not be so aggressively plain in her dress; and while your jacket and hat are all very well for winter, our bright days are here now and there are warm hours in the sunshine no matter how cold it grows toward night. You're not sending money home, are you?"

"I'm—I've been helping dress Cousin Ruth," faltered the girl.

"But that isn't right Nathalie, child, and your uncle is the last man to allow it, if indeed he knows of it. Your little salary should go to keeping you nicely dressed, and in laying up for a rainy day. The major told me you had put most of it in the bank. Do they allow you interest on it? Forgive me, dear. I don't wish to intrude on your personal affairs, but you've become very dear to me, Nathalie, and I cannot see you pinching and denying yourself if it be to provide for others who are quite as well able to take care of themselves as you are; more so, I fear, for you are not looking a bit well of late."

No answer, but the girl's face was averted and she was trembling now from head to foot. Big tears were starting from her eyes. She was biting her lips in the effort to control their mad quivering.

Anxious and troubled, Mrs. Barry half turned on her couch and strove to see what Nathalie was doing. She held forth a fragile white hand. "Nathalie," she said, softly.

It was too much. The girl turned suddenly, as though to throw herself upon her knees and clasp the extended hand, but at that very instant brisk steps and cheery voices were heard at the door, the gong bell clanged, and Nathalie rushed from the room and up the narrow stairs.

It was Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Ray who entered,

fresh, radiant, blithe and joyous, the pictures of health and happiness despite the fact that their respective lords were far afield and no man but Sheridan could say when they would be allowed to return to their post—and he wouldn't. The renegade Indians, far from rushing northward on the old accustomed trail, as had been predicted, had lashed out westward and made a wide circuit before striking for the sand hills of Nebraska. There had been no conflict between them and the squadrons of the —th. The latter were now trotting a stern chase with the quarry long leagues ahead, and while they were saying unbecoming and unpublishable things abroad, their better halves were thanking heaven at their army homes for the news that the fleeing warriors were safely across the Union Pacific and "scooting" for the savage fastnesses in far northwest Nebraska: news which brought disgust unspeakable to the pursuing troopers, but to these women left at Russell joy utterly unconfined.

"Isn't it too good for anything?" exclaimed Mrs. Freeman, as she led the way into Mrs. Barry's pretty parlor. "They have got so long a start our troops can't possibly catch them, and the cavalry from Robinson and Red Cloud will have to do it all. I've been in misery until I got the news just now. Where's Nathalie? Is she ready? I wanted to drive in before luncheon."

But Mrs. Barry put her finger to her lips and glanced significantly aloft.

"Nathalie is utterly upset about something this morning," she murmured. "Do sit down a moment, won't you? I want to talk with you about her. I am so troubled on her account. She has been ailing for days, as you know, seeming nervous and troubled, and it has become so much worse of late. What can be the matter?"

Then Mrs. Freeman looked appealingly at Mrs. Ray, and as she remained silent, the former spoke:

"Mrs. Barry, if we, too, didn't think everything of Nathalie I shouldn't say this, but we both feel —Mrs. Ray and I—that you should know the story that has been going round. We've both heard it. We couldn't help hearing it. Everybody seems to have heard it in the last two days, and it isn't all Mrs. Turner's doing either. Marion," she said, turning impulsively to her younger friend, "do help me, it is so hard."

Looking first at one, then at the other, Mrs. Barry saw too plainly the sorrow and embarrassment in each fair face.

"Tell me everything," she murmured. "Surely if trouble comes to her we should be the ones to help."

"It is briefly this, Mrs. Barry: It is told that

Nathalie has several times been seen either away out on the prairie before the troops went away, or else down here near the store since that time, talking earnestly, pleadingly with a strange man—not a soldier—a tall, powerful fellow. At first it was thought to be—you know—one of Fanny Turner's fabrications, but Miss Maynard solemnly assured Mrs. Stannard she had seen it twice; and now Mrs. Ray, you've got to tell the rest."

"It is only this, Mrs. Barry: You know the one failing Hogan, our Irish groom has. He is devoted to Captain Ray, but once in a long while he yields to temptation, and the other night he was in town and had evidently been drinking when he came back, and had lost his key to the door of the little room he has in the extension at the rear of the quarters. Will had gone over to the barracks, and I heard our cook go to let Hogan in, and heard him telling her thickly of an adventure he had had. He was excited and talked loudly, and I feared it would rouse the neighbors, so I threw open the back window and told Jane to make him go to his bed without another word, and he obeyed, but his eye was all black and swollen in the morning and I saw there was some truth in what he said—that just back of your quarters he had stumbled on a big, burly man in civilian dress to whom a girl was talk-

ing low, begging and imploring and crying, and the man answered her roughly, and Hogan thought the girl was your housemaid, for she heard his step and ran indoors at once, and then he himself had some words with the man, and got knocked down, he said, so quick he never knew what hit him, and the man had vanished when he regained his feet. Hogan's man and that described by Miss Maynard are apparently the same. Who can it be and what possible hold can one like him have on a girl so sweet and refined as Nathalie?"

Mrs. Barry listened without interposing a word, but her eyes were eloquent with sorrow and perplexity. At last she spoke.

"Can you remember the night, Mrs. Ray?"

"Yes; it was the night I was here with you—the night the news came that our battalion, too, had to go."

There was a moment of silence. Mrs. Barry had covered her eyes with her thin white hand and was thinking intently, and presently, without removing her hand, she asked, and the question itself was significant:

"Do you know—has Mrs. Turner been very much with Miss Maynard lately?"

And her visitors looked at each other without speaking. After waiting a moment for an answer

and receiving none, Mrs. Barry looked up. "Why do you not speak?" she said to Mrs. Freeman, who sat nearest. "You know that your silence tells me that my conjecture is correct. And now about Mr. Maynard. Mrs. Stannard told me that he sat up two days ago, was out on the porch awhile, but that he seemed anything but benefited. Did he see Nathalie and this man down by the store? Is that one reason he has not left his room since?"

"Yes, Mrs. Barry. Miss Maynard has told Mrs. Stannard and others, too, that not only she, but her brother, saw the meeting, and her brother recognized the man as one he had seen in the crowd the day of the trouble in town. But now let me say right here that I can believe no ill of her; that there is probably some hold, some claim, or she would never be seen with such a looking character; and that he is reprobate I thoroughly believe. She is shielding him for somebody's sake or she never in the world would have concealed her meetings with him from you. I say again, Mrs. Barry," persisted Mrs. Freeman, her color rising with the warmth of her appeal, "I will believe no ill of Nathalie, and that's one reason why I so earnestly urged her to go to town with me. I wanted to try in every way to win her confidence and be a help to her. I had hoped so much from her knowing Nannie Bryan,

but they didn't get along together at all. Nathalie is utterly unerved by this trouble. That's the truth of it, and she dare not tell the cause to anybody. Did you say she was in her room?"

"Yes, she was here with me and I was urging her to go with you to town, and trying to get her to tell me what was worrying her, when she heard your steps and vanished. I think she was crying. I've found this out, that she has been sending some money home to help dress a cousin of hers."

And just then came another step, quick and business-like upon the piazza. It was the orderly from the adjutant's office with the mail. As the servant entered with the little packet both the visitors sprang to the door and called after the garrison Mercury, eager to know what he had for them. He came back, smiling, with letters for both, and yet their faces were long as they re-entered, for there was not a line from their lords.

But Mrs. Barry's face was clouded too. "Look at this," she said, and held out a dingy missive with the Cheyenne postmark and a scrawling superscription, "Miss Nath. Baird. In care of Mrs. Majer Barry, Fort Russell." "Once before a letter came for her from town, but it was addressed in a scholarly hand, and I remember now how agitated she was at sight of it. But this is the work of some uneducated

person. It seems Irish somehow, that 'In care of Mrs. Majer' especially. What can we do—what shall we do to help her? If she would only confide in some one!"

But before evening it was definitely settled that that was the one thing poor Nathalie could not or would not do. Mrs. Barry sent the letter to her room with the message that Mrs. Freeman was there to take her driving, and would she not come down. And the maid returned, saying Miss Baird was not well enough to go. She had been lying on her bed, the girl admitted, for she had to wait some little time before the door was unlocked. Then Mrs. Freeman penned a little note. "Dearest Nathalie: Won't you see me just a minute or two?" But the maid came back in five minutes with the penciled words, "Please, please do not think I am ungrateful for all your patience and kindness, but indeed I am not fit to see any one just now."

And so the friends had gone sadly away without the longed-for word with her, and then Mrs. Stannard came to read to the invalid, but the books were set aside and the two took counsel together as to what should be done. They sent tea and an appetizing luncheon up to her room, and the maid brought back her best thanks and said that she would try to eat. She was writing a letter then.

But when two hours later they sent up to see how she was, the maid reported that the luncheon was untouched; even the tea seemed to have been neglected. They heard Nathalie's step on the landing above, as in troubled silence the ladies looked at each other and the maid stood patiently by. They heard it light and almost stealthy on the little landing to the stairway, and both looked eagerly to the door as though expectant of her coming, but she never neared it. Without an instant's falter, the girl hastened through the hall and out of the house.

"She has been answering that note," said Mrs. Barry, the moment she had dismissed the servant, "and now, trusting to no one, has gone to put it in the mail-bag herself."

It was late when Nathalie returned to the house, and this time she came straight to her protector's side, knelt at the sofa, and, never waiting for welcoming word or caress, took the slender white hand in both her own, bowed over it almost humbly a moment, and then, lifting her head, throwing it back with gesture almost desperate, abruptly spoke:

"Mrs. Barry—I—I've *got* to say it—I can be of no further use to you now. I'm bringing trouble, yes, even shame to you who have been so loving and kind to me, and to your friends who have been so eager to help me. I'm not fit to stay. Do me one last kindness. Send me home."

Her fingers were working nervously. Her eyes were hard and hot and dry. There was no weakness, no indecision, no melting now. The girl had spent long hours that day looking her trouble in the face and had made her resolution. She was set and determined. It was not as suppliant she knelt. It was to urge, almost to demand.

"Nathalie, child," began Mrs. Barry, "you do yourself infinite wrong. There has been no talk of shame, no thought of even blame attached to you; but those who love you and would be your friends *are* troubled because of your trouble."

"Mrs. Barry, don't tell me there has not been evil report, if not shameful report. Can I not see? Why, otherwise, should Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Raymond turn their heads away and refuse to recognize me on the walk? Why should Miss Maynard avoid meeting me as she has twice done, shrinking back into her gate as though I were—contamination. There has been talk—cruel talk, and I know it, and what is worse—ten times worse—is that much that is said I can never deny. In my misery I've tried to hide it from everybody, but he has been utterly reckless. He has dogged and dared and followed everywhere, even here. Mrs. Barry—Mrs. Barry, there is only one place on earth where I can avoid him, and that is, home. Send me there. In pity send me home."

And then at last the overcharged heart gave way; the poor girl burst into a passion of tears and, turning, she threw herself prone upon the rug at the sofa side, buried her face in her arms and sobbed like a spirit-broken child.

For several minutes the storm of her passionate weeping raged unbroken. She was weak and exhausted, weak even as the invalid herself, when at last she was persuaded once more to kneel beside the couch, lay her swollen face on her protector's bosom, and submit to the soothing of her almost motherly caress. For a long time, as the sunshine vanished, and the twilight settled down, and the gloom and shadow of the coming night enshrouded the little parlor, the girl knelt nerveless, encircled by those loving arms. Mrs. Barry would ask no questions, seek no explanation now. Her one aim was to calm and comfort. Confidences, she assured herself, would follow. The maid came to the doorway with the parlor lamp, but was bidden to leave it in the adjoining room and to excuse the ladies should visitors appear. At last Nathalie herself attempted to move. "Why, it is long past time for your tea," she murmured brokenly. "How selfish and forgetful I've been. Let me get it," she pleaded.

"And you, too, Nathalie, have not tasted a

mouthful since breakfast. Order tea, dear. Then we'll talk."

But even after the soothing cup Nathalie Baird amazed her friend and comforter. To every plea that she should reveal the name of the man who had so destroyed her peace of mind and to disclose the nature of the claim he held, the girl was deaf and determined. "Do not ask me that," she said. "I have pledged my very word not to tell. All I ask is to be allowed to go, to relieve you of the shame and anxiety my staying would surely cause. Oh, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Barry," she cried aloud, "you do not dream what he could do. He threatens me even here, under your roof. He says unless I bring or send him more he will come here to this house to demand it. Oh, don't you see—don't you know why I do not end it all, and by stealing away at night and hiding until the first train goes eastward, I could relieve you of all this misery? Mrs. Barry, I haven't a penny in the world—he has taken every cent!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE doctor came away from Ronald Maynard's room that evening a puzzled man. He was not the most astute practitioner in the service. Of the three "medicos" employed at the post two were in the field with the battalions of Barry and Stannard and the third—we need not give his name—remained to look after the women and children, the band and non-combatants, and the infantry guard sent over from Steele. He was a good, conscientious young man. He had found the lieutenant so much improved two days before that he advised his sitting out on the porch and sunning himself, and was surprised at the result of his experiment. Maynard said the sight of the far-away snowcaps of the peaks only made him mad with eagerness to get into saddle and away to join his friends in the field. So if they couldn't let him go to the regiment there was no use in his getting worse by fretting out of doors. Maynard was distinctly and aggressively ill-tempered in his remarks, thought the doctor, and ought therefore to be getting well, but he was not

as well by several degrees as he had been three days before, and for the life of him the doctor couldn't say what had gone amiss, until, coming down into that selfsame evening sunshine, he found Mrs. Turner and Miss Maynard with their heads close together—so close that they could only find time for a very perfunctory greeting to Mrs. Raymond who had just gone by, but who sprang up quickly enough at his appearance on the piazza with Mrs. Stannard by his side, and as he looked at Fanny Turner's now coquettishly smiling face, the little medico's eyes were suddenly enlightened. He was a married man, it is perhaps unnecessary to say, and therefore had a more comprehensive knowledge of the personal characteristics of the ladies at the post than could ever have been acquired as a bachelor. He, in common with every man and woman, had noted the rapid growth of Ronald Maynard's devotions to Miss Baird, their equally sudden cessation, and he, too, had heard and pished and pshawed and pooh-poohed the rapidly circulated stories about her meetings with the mysterious man. "You might as well tell me that Mrs. Barry was out flirting with a stranger, now that the major's gone," said he to his spouse, in somewhat wrathful tone. "If ever a girl was truth and purity personified, it's that Miss Baird." But he, too, was non-

plussed and silenced when the wife of his bosom declared, "Well, I'm not telling you alone what I've heard, but what I've seen. Our spare room windows look out over the prairie back of the hospital, and I've seen her meet a man away out there." The doctor was heard to express a wish that the spare room was in Halifax for all the good it did them, but that didn't help matters. It was something in the faces of the two women—Miss Maynard grave and anxious, Mrs. Turner coquettishly smiling—that gave him a clue to his patient's feverish pulse and lack-luster eye. Mrs. Turner, as has been said, could rob a woman of her reputation and receive her with open arms almost in the same instant.

Mrs. Stannard had been writing to her major in a quiet corner, while the newly-made intimates were busy outside. She had intended waylaying the doctor as he came downstairs, in order that Stannard might have the latest bulletin as to the patient, but so absorbed had she become in telling "Luce" the home news, and so slowly and quietly did he descend the stair, that she never heard him until the opening of the outer door aroused her, and she had just time to catch him on the porch.

The little man looked badgered as the three surrounded him. "Maynard isn't as well as he ought to be," was, however, his downright reply. "His

wound is doing well, but he isn't. That's all there is to be said about it, except"—and here he looked intently, first at the sister, then at the sister's new-found friend—"except that just now nothing of a worrying or disturbing character should be allowed to reach him. It is bad enough that he should be fretting so to get to the regiment. Oh, you'll all have letters to-morrow, Mrs. Stannard," he continued, "for we heard that the major crossed at North Platte to-day."

"I was just writing to him, hoping to intercept him there," she replied, "but couriers will undoubtedly be sent after them, will they not? Have you heard where Major Barry was likely to strike the railway? The Indians must be far ahead now."

"So far that I can see no chance of our people coming up with them, unless they go to sleep," said the doctor. "Now I've said nothing of their crossing to Maynard. I want him kept quiet to-night, if possible. I'll be back by and by." And with those parting injunctions the doctor took his leave, and Mrs. Stannard, after a courteous word or two with her guests, left them together and returned to her desk.

But up aloft, in his cozy room, Mr. Maynard was not resting at all. Despite his stout declaration that he did not believe, and would not believe a word said at

the expense of Nathalie Baird, deep down in his heart, even before he saw her brief meeting with the big stranger, that soft, sunshiny afternoon, he knew that there was abundant reason for believing that the disturber had been there before. He had never forgotten for a moment that extraordinary occurrence the night of the hop—the shadowy civilian who tossed pebbles up at her window, and then floored him in the twinkling of an eye when he had sought to challenge. Furthermore, Maynard had caught the outlines of the stranger's bulk that night, and those outlines strongly resembled those of the man who bent so confidentially over her as she stood with bowed head, yes, with apparently attentive ear, down at the end of the row by old No. 1. What could be the explanation? What but that some former lover was pursuing her here, and that she, though unable to welcome him to the garrison, was not unwilling to meet him; and if she would meet him stealthily by day away out on the prairie, in some of its swales or depressions, why not by night, when none could spy upon her actions? What other explanation could there be? Was not her beauty enough to lure a man from the ends of the earth? Would not he have sought and followed her anywhere, had she but kept the queendom of his faith and trust. Love her? He did—deeply,

passionately, miserably; for now he recalled that she had never given him encouragement; that only for a day or two before his mishap had she shown shy pleasure at his coming; and all those days that he used to ride out in search of her, was it not more than probable now that he had only been very much in the way—a nuisance to her and to her skulking lover? Very bitter were his thoughts, and, manlike, he included in his jealous anger not only the girl who had caused him such poignant suffering, but that other—the sister who had been the first to open his eyes to his queen's unworthiness.

And so when Grace Maynard came to him soon after evening gun-fire with some dainty refreshment Mrs. Stannard had prepared for him, he turned away almost petulantly, and with his face to the wall said he could not bear the sight of anything to eat. And this was the brother who ever since babyhood had been her charge to keep, her loyal and obedient vassal.

Sighing heavily, she turned away and would have gone, but he called her back. "Grace," he said, "there's something I've got to say. I'm getting all right. I can sit up just as well as not, and there's no reason why to-morrow or next day I shouldn't go to my own room, and why within the week I shouldn't hurry after the regiment."

"Oh, Ronald," she interrupted, "the doctor says it would be death to you to try it."

"Well, better that kind of death than fretting to death here. It's killing me by inches, Grace, and I want to get away, and—we've stayed too long here at the Stannards' anyhow. It's awfully good of them, but we have no right, no claim, so I'm going to move day after to-morrow to my own den, and —you ought to be thinking about starting for home."

Think about starting for home, indeed? Was she in her sound senses? Was this her little Ronald telling her she should be returning to that far Mohawk village before he was fairly well? It was incredible; it was more than that, it was ungrateful, undutiful—cruel, heartless. She had arranged it all on very different lines. The doctor was to give a certificate.—she had studied out the whole situation —a certificate on which Ronald was to be granted a month's leave with permission to apply for another; and then she would bundle up her hero baby brother, and by easy stages she would trundle him home, and there he would swing in his hammock, and she and Gertrude would do all the reading and nursing and petting—she and Gertrude at first, so as to arouse no suspicion and consequent rebellion—then she would gradually slip away for a few moments

at a time, then for half an hour or so, and more and more leave them alone together, and Cupid and proximity would do the rest.

But here he was calmly, positively telling her that it was his purpose to move to that other roof, never suggesting that she should follow and occupy Dana's room or Hollis', but, with almost callous indifference, saying it was time for her to be thinking of the homeward start, because he meant as soon as possible to take the field. It meant defeat to her hopes and plans. It might leave him still under the influence of this dangerously lovely New England girl, whom she was bound to regard as unworthy his notice, yet could not really believe guilty, no matter what Mrs. Turner thought, of anything graver than indiscretion.

The same gloaming that shrouded Nathalie and her gentle friend in the adjoining quarters had stolen in upon this unprompted conference. The sister could no longer see her brother's face. He lay there vaguely conscious of, yet never hearing, the rapid beating of her aching heart. Perhaps in his own dumb misery the young fellow did not wish to see or hear the first symptom of either pain or remonstrance. The one thought uppermost in his mind was, that for long, radiant, beautiful days, for rapturous hours of night thoughts, Nathalie Baird

had lived queen of his heart's first love, pure and strong and fervent, and that from that queendom had been dashed to earth a broken idol, and it was his sister who dealt the blow that shattered her throne. For Mrs. Turner he felt only impatient contempt. He recalled now how often he had heard of her as seeing wrong in and saying wrong of every woman of whom she felt the faintest envy, and already there was growing up in his heart strong reaction against the two "informers," as he called them, and new excuse, new explanation of Nathalie's strange conduct. He did not wish to wound his sister, but if he had to prepare her for the move he at least could not wound her half so deep as her revelation had stabbed him. For several minutes she had stood there after he had ceased. Her first impulse was to protest, and vehemently, against his decision. Then she was minded of the doctor's demand that he should be spared all worry and excitement, for his sleep had been fitful and broken, and he sorely needed calm repose. At last she ventured to trust herself:

"We will not decide to-night, Ronald," she said, as gently as she could. "I will think over all you say, and, if the doctor agrees with you——"

"Whether he agrees with me or not," broke in the young soldier impatiently, "I leave this house

to-morrow or next day. I will not remain here, a tax on Mrs. Stannard's kindness; and I'm going to the field the moment I can walk. I shall tell Mrs. Stannard the first thing to-morrow morning."

But when morning came it brought new distraction, and for the time at least banished all thought of change of quarters.

He had passed a wretched night, despite the doctor's late visit and a suspicion of soothing syrup in his medicine. He was awake long hours, and was only falling into a troubled doze when the rafters shook with the dull boom of the reveille gun, and the bugle of the infantry summoned the little garrison to roll call. Not ten minutes thereafter came the sound of voices on the road below, one broadly Irish, loud, truculent, semi-defiant—the other low, firm, but authoritative.

"I tell ye the leddy *will* see me—she'll see me the instant she sees this," the first was saying. "Him that sint it's dying on me hands wid sorra a——"

"Stop your infernal noise!" was the fierce interruption. "You'll see no one here until people are up, and not then until you can give an account of yourself."

And Maynard, painfully struggling out of bed, reached the window with no little effort, and

gazed out upon the road. Writhing in the grasp of the corporal of the guard, to whose assistance another soldier had run, was a brawny Irishman, and Maynard knew him at a glance. It was the same fellow whose shock head had peered from the upper window over the Empire saloon the day of his luckless mission in search of absentees. Frantically now he was waving a paper in his hand, as though striving to attract attention, while a stalwart arm and hand nearly throttled him and surely stopped his speech. And even while Maynard stood there, marveling, and with sinking heart, asking himself what new complication involved the girl he so hopelessly loved, he felt a light touch on his arm, and his sister, in loose wrapper, had hastened to his side.

"Ronald, this is most imprudent," she began; but he shook her off roughly, relentlessly, for there, on the roadway below, before his very eyes, a tall, slender girl, her beautiful hair adrift, clad like his sister, in loose wrapper, was hastening toward the struggling group, and at sight of her the contest ceased. The corporal respectfully touched his cap. The furious captive forgot, for a moment at least, his wrath, and eagerly held forth the scrap of paper in his hand. She took it hastily, read it rapidly through, turned as though in utter helplessness and

despair. Was it fancy, Maynard asked himself—did not her eyes imploringly seek his window for an instant? Then as suddenly she turned. "Say I'm coming quick as possible. Go!" she cried, and then fled back into the house.

CHAPTER IX.

THE excitement consequent upon the appearance of the Empire's "bouncer," Mr. P. Maloney, at the early hour of half-past five o'clock this fine April morning, was not slow in spreading itself from the guardhouse to the quarters and thence to officers' row. By the time the bugle sounded for guard-mounting at nine there was hardly a household along the line that did not know that just before gun-fire the Celtic Cerberus of this once popular resort had turned up in garrison, boldly demanding the right to ring at Major Barry's door, and merely asking where it was. Very properly the corporal of the guard had been summoned by the sentry who first sighted the presumable prowler, and very properly the corporal had told Mr. Maloney that this was no hour to be calling at officers' quarters, and that he'd have to come with him to the guardhouse and wait there the pleasure of the temporary post-commander, and very properly the corporal was amazed, if not shocked, at the sudden appearance of the young lady inmate of the Barrys'

quarters, and her announcement that she would follow the messenger without delay. True to her word, not half an hour later Miss Baird issued from the eastern gate and started swiftly on her three-mile walk to town. The corporal saw her go, so did the hospital steward and the man-of-all-work, sweeping out the store, and so did the lone sentry, pacing his post along the row of storehouses, and such a thing had never before been heard of at Russell. Maloney, it seems, had ridden out on a borrowed horse, and had hastened back with his answer the moment the bewildered non-commissioned officer let him go. What no one of these men could understand was, how it happened that one so fair and delicate as Miss Baird should have to take that lonely walk instead of being sent in by some one of the several vehicles owned among the officers' families. What they did not dream was that of all the women in the crowded garrison not one of their number at that moment felt so friendless, so utterly alone in the world, as Nathalie Baird.

At eight o'clock Mrs. Stannard had received a brief line by the hands of Mrs. Barry's maid. It merely said, "Come to me for a moment as soon as you can," and Mrs. Stannard lost no time.

She found her invalid friend and neighbor pallid, distressed and alone. Her eyes must have asked for

Nathalie, for Mrs. Barry, without a word, handed her a little note, and opening, Mrs. Stannard read:

"I am called away by a summons that cannot be ignored. He is desperately ill, perhaps dying, and has sent for me. After this you know why I ought never to return to your roof. The shame of it all overpowers me, and yet I cannot do less for him than I am doing, and I cannot—must not—tell you why. To-night—to-morrow you shall hear from me, and then—let me go home and let me be forgotten. Your heartbroken

"NATHALIE."

"What can we do?" was Mrs. Stannard's exclamation after the momentary stupefaction seemed to have passed. "May I not get the doctor and drive after her with him?"

"Could you? Will you?" asked Mrs. Barry, almost weeping. "Ah, I knew you would. Send first for him, and then I'll tell you all I know."

But as luck would have it the little doctor had his hands full this fateful morning. The only practitioner left at the post, it was but natural that half the laundresses' children should be down with various infantile maladies, and that officers' row should find itself in urgent need of his services. Meantime there had come many a caller to the Barrys' door—women like Mrs. Ray and Mrs. Freeman, full of sympathy and sorrow; others, like Mrs. Turner and

Mrs. Raymond, inspired by a rage of curiosity veiled beneath the conventionalities of "kind inquiries." Mrs. Barry could see no one at first, but yielded to Mrs. Freeman's importunities, and she too, with Mrs. Ray, was taken into confidence. It was nearly half-past ten when at last the doctor drove up with the post surgeon's team and double-seated carriage, and, just as Mrs. Stannard was being handed in, and numbers of interested spectators were looking on up and down the row, there cantered into garrison on a scrub of a pony a youngster who used to earn a precarious livelihood in those days carrying travelers' hand luggage, running errands, and doing odd jobs around the few hotels and many barrooms, and he had a note for Mrs. Barry, addressed in Nathalie's small and tremulous hand. They took it in to her at once and she opened it.

It was a brief, piteous, yet almost imperative demand for twenty-five dollars to be sent to her by the bearer.

The doctor shook his head. Mrs. Stannard looked grave, but Mrs. Barry never hesitated. "It's the last thing she would ever have done had it not been vitally necessary." The bills were placed in an envelope with a few lines begging her to be ready to see Mrs. Stannard and the doctor and return with them without fail if by that time she had

finished what had to be done, and the ragged Mercury trotted away with the message clutched in a dingy hand—all Russell wondering the while.

Half an hour later, the doctor, leaving Mrs. Stannard with the carriage at the post office, strolled quietly around to the Empire and asked to see the proprietor. He wasn't in. Maloney then. He'd just gone out and wouldn't be back. Then could they tell him where he could find Maloney? No, they'd no idea where he'd gone. Evidently information was lacking at the Empire, but a happy thought occurred to the doctor. Hannifin's was just across the way, and to Hannifin's he went, feeling well assured that the rivalry between the establishments would prompt some one at the latter to tell what might be detrimental of the other, and he was right. "There had been a drunken row at the Empire late last night," said Hannifin, "between toughs that wouldn't be allowed in a respectable saloon like this, for instance." Two fellows were badly cut, and others were wanted by the city marshal, but Hannifin could only tell that a man called Boston was mixed up in it, and had been slashed by somebody else, and that it was claimed that the whole gang were strangers in Cheyenne, only two of them having been seen there before last night. Then the doctor asked if any of Boston's

people had been seen, and they hadn't. So far as Hannifin knew, Boston had no friends or relatives, nor could he tell where he was now in hiding; even the police, what there was of them, didn't know that. So the doctor reluctantly turned away, and after reporting his ill success to Mrs. Stannard it was proposed that they should find Rackets, the boy messenger, and question him again; and find him they did, at noon, but not before, and his story was straight as a string. The man who gave him the job at the railway platform was there to wait for him when he got back. He took the package, paid the dollar bargained for, and walked rapidly away up into town. Where he'd gone Rackets didn't know. Who he was Rackets didn't know, neither did anybody at the depot. "Him and two other fellers" had reached Cheyenne by the Denver train the day before.

Troubled and perplexed, these would-be rescuers turned their horses' heads and drove back into town, hardly knowing what to do. The one police official the doctor had an acquaintance with was at the Railroad House, and had there declared that no one of their force of five or six "occasionals" had seen anything of the young lady or knew anything of the men, but they were straining every nerve to know. "What we do know is that there

was a knife fight at the Empire between these strangers and this fellow Boston, who's been knocking about here for some ten days, but what has become of him is more than we can find out. The town is full of strangers getting ready for the Hills, and we're just as apt to run in the wrong man as the right one. What we hope is to corral them on the night train. But where they carried Boston to after he was knifed is what gets me."

To think of having to return to Mrs. Barry with a report so meager as this! Mrs. Stannard could not bear it, but return was imperative, for the doctor had patients who needed his attention, and he had not seen Maynard at all that day. Reluctantly they abandoned the investigation after a few more words with the police and a promise to return that afternoon if nothing were heard of the young lady in the meantime. Then the horses were headed for the open prairie, which they reached at a spanking trot, and there, far out across the breezy level, was trundling briskly toward the post the little team of grays and the covered spring-wagon owned by an old retired soldier who had a ranch near by, and before the surgeon's well-matched bays had covered half the distance the leading equipage disappeared within the gate, and ten minutes later when Mrs. Stannard sadly stepped from the carriage at Mrs.

Barry's door she was accosted by Mrs. Turner, who came tripping from Miss Maynard's side to meet her and to say with eager dilation of the eye and pursings of the mouth:

"She's back—she's just got here. Where on earth can she have been?"

And turning, unsatisfying, from her questioner, Mrs. Stannard rang at the Barrys' door and entered and found Nathalie sobbing her heart out as she knelt by Mrs. Barry's side, encircled by that lady's loving arms.

"I declare," said Mrs. Turner that afternoon, "there's just ten times as much mystery and misery about this old post when the men are away as when they're here!" for that night the doctor had a patient at Barrys' who needed all his care—Nathalie's strength had given way and she was very ill indeed.

And then came stirring, thrilling news next day from the front. Both battalions of the —th, diving after the Cheyennes into the sand hills, had suddenly been brought to bay. Yellow Wolf and his desperate band, finding themselves confronted, so said the young men sent far out in advance, by strong forces of cavalry and infantry from the northern agencies, had recoiled to certain well-known old fastnesses in the deep breaks to the south

of the Niobrara, and in recoiling had stumbled against Stannard's advance, thereby bringing on a sharp and rattling fight that had warmed the cockles of the old campaigner's heart and shown even his recruits to be fellows of excellent mettle. All the same, Yellow Wolf was in no mood for a general *melée*, or he could have made it hot for Stannard that crisp April morning, for he had only four troops, Barry being some miles away to the southeast. The two battalions were converging as they hastened northward, and had Yellow Wolf been a strategist he had excellent opportunity to beat his opponents in detail. The Indians, however, really wished to avoid conflict with the cavalry. Every life was precious in the long-badgered and fast-diminishing tribe, and there was something almost pathetic in the efforts of the old chief and leader of the Cheyennes to get his people, warriors, women and children, safely in touch with their kindred of the northern tribe, the very thing which the Interior Department was most anxious to prevent.

For an hour his young men had kept up their dashing, long range fight with Stannard's skirmish line, striving to kill and wound as many of the soldiers as possible, so as to hamper their subsequent movements. Others, at the same time, far to the north, kept watch over the slow advance of the

force from the agencies, while other braves still, safely escorted the village—the old men, women and children—far in among the fastnesses of the sand hills to the west. There, as among the Bad Lands along the Dakota border, were natural fortifications, and tortuous, intricate trails, along which only in single file could pursuers march, and twenty braves could hold the passage against a regiment of soldiers. So perfectly was this masked from the sight of the cavalry, cautiously advancing from the north, but still nearly a dozen miles away, and from Stannard's view, thanks to the intervening ridges at which his men were impetuously dashing, that when, after a long morning of skirmishing with not a little loss to officers, men and mounts, the major ordered the recall and assembly sounded and proper disposition made for the care of the wounded, nothing whatever had been seen of the flank movement of the village. An hour later, just about one o'clock, when the warriors themselves seemed to have drawn away from his widely dispersed skirmishers now formed in a big circle about the pack train and wounded, the veteran soldier sent an officer and a dozen men to see what could be seen from the summit of a butte barely a mile distant, and almost instantly these began signaling, and presently a trooper came tearing back at a gallop.

"The cavalry from White River, sir, the lieutenant says. You can see 'em plain not more than six or eight miles off to the north."

"Damn the cavalry from White River!" said Stannard explosively. "Where are the Indians?"

"None in sight, sir, anywhere."

"Well, then, they've got to their holes in the sand hills, and we'll have hell to pay rooting 'em out," was the old dragoon's disgusted outbreak.

And Stannard was a true prophet. The news that reached Russell by telegraph that fine April evening was that Colonel Atherton himself had hastened from the railway northward to the field, that Barry was ordered to close in on Stannard, that the Indians had gotten into the strongest of their strongholds, and that war to the knife was the least that could be expected. Still, with Atherton in general command, with two strong battalions such as were led by Barry and Stannard, with the strong force from White River, all in the field in front of him, perhaps old Yellow Wolf might think it best to surrender, sure as he was of kind treatment—and this was the flattering unction laid to the souls of most of the wives and mothers at Russell that anxious evening when the list of casualties came in by wire, and this was what their infantry friends preached and propheised and what they all

tried to believe—all but poor Maynard who felt sure there would be a sharp fight all because he wasn't there to win his spurs. From more causes than one he was profoundly unhappy, feverish and intractable, and the doctor had to chide him earnestly when he called later to see him.

"This won't do, sir," was the medico's rebuke. "By good rights you ought now to be nearly well enough to mount and ride, but you've been chafing, fretting and retarding your recovery. I'm not so deficient in the matter of patients as not to be able to spare a few, and you ought to be helping, not hampering me. I suppose you know Miss Baird is quite ill."

"Miss Baird," stammered Maynard, his face filling instantly with anxiety, his fine young eyes clouding. Not a word had Grace said to him upon the subject.

"Yes. You knew she went to town to-day?"

"I—heard her say that she would go," faltered the lieutenant.

"Well," continued the doctor, "God only knows what that poor child has been going through, but she's all unstrung, all broken up; and though she has youth and strength and elasticity in her favor, and will probably recover in a short time, she is utterly prostrated to-night. Now if you were only able to be about——"

"I!" interrupted Maynard. "What then? You know well enough that I am fit for many kinds of work even now."

"Not for trailing the gang of sharps that we've searched in vain for to-day," said the doctor. "Even the police could not locate them. Yet, some one of their number has some hold on that poor girl—the big, burly tough they call Boston, I fancy; and after getting every cent of her earnings he gets into a knife scrape last night, has been stabbed, sends for her and asks her to raise twenty-five dollars more for him, and then sends her tottering home, more dead than alive. I suppose the money is needed to buy him out of some trouble, and start him away from here, but that's only my theory. She will not tell anything about him, which confirms my belief that he's a jail bird. Now what can a girl like her be doing with a man like that?"

Maynard winced as though the doctor had used an actual instead of a verbal probe.

"You never heard her speak of any such?" asked his visitor, eying him searchingly.

"No," was the short answer, and Maynard's face looked white and drawn. He arose from his easy chair and limped to the window and gazed miserably out upon the starlit heavens and the flickering lamps across the dim parade. He wished the doctor

in Jericho, and that practitioner was not slow to see it.

"Well, I'll leave you, youngster," said he patronizingly. "What you've got to do to pull out of this is to quit fret and worry, if you want to get after the field column. So 'long." And then he went trotting down the stairs where feminine voices had been heard for some little time in conversation. Mrs. Stannard was away with Mrs. Barry. It must then be Grace Maynard and her now inseparable friend, Mrs. Turner. The latter pounced upon the doctor with cooing inquiry for "poor Miss Baird," and was briefly told that the trouble seemed to be nervous prostration more than anything else. "What your brother needs is freedom from worry," he began at once. "He is fretting himself into another fever," and the doctor turned abruptly to Miss Maynard—he couldn't bear Mrs. Turner. "Now I'm going to send over a sedative that he is to take, for he's very nervous and fretful to-night."

With that, and blandly unconscious of the fact that much of the nervousness was due to his own ministrations, the little man departed.

"Then I'll go too," said Mrs. Turner, in her drawl of sisterly sympathy. "I know you must be longing to be with him, but I'll come first thing in the morning. Isn't it dreadful?" She paused as the

door was opened for her and glanced out into outer darkness with a shudder. "Isn't it dreadful to have no one to walk home with?—no man, I mean," she hastily added, as Miss Maynard took down the major's cape, which she had fallen quite into the way of wearing.

A little later brother and sister were alone together. He had been reading over a letter and stowed it in the pocket of his dressing-gown as she entered.

'I missed the orderly with the mail to-day, Ronald. Did you hear from father?" she asked.

He shook his head, but made no other reply.

"Well, wasn't that a letter?" she asked, with a glance at the gaping pocket.

"Yes, but not from him, Grace. And I must tell you again, I am so troubled about him. You ought to be there, not here. There is no excuse whatever for your remaining a burden on Mrs. Stannard——"

"How can you say so, Ronald? Who could nurse you were I not here?"

"I could do very well. There is no further danger. The doctor says I can be out in a very few days. Father has no one but Aunt Willett to care for him there——"

"He has Gertrude, who is sweetness and devotion itself, whom he loves as he would his own daughter,

as he hoped—as I hoped, yes, and expected, Ronald—she would and should be, or that at least she should and we should, have your assurance by this time that that was your intention. You know it has long been the dearest wish of your father's heart."

"I do not know it, Grace, nor do I believe it. He never so much at hinted at such a thing. You alone," said Maynard, his cheeks flushing and with an angry light in his eyes as he rose from his chair, "you alone persist in this scheme—I don't know what else to call it—and I don't think Gertrude would thank you in the least."

"Gertrude had every right short of a positive engagement to consider herself pledged to you and you to her, Ronald, and not until you met this stranger, of whom you know nothing that is not most unsatisfactory, to say the least——"

"Grace!"

"Oh, I know how infatuated a boy can be, and that is why I stand here, as I have time and again in your past, a shield between you and harm or punishment. Ronald! Ronald! for the sake of all those years," she cried, softening and tearful now, as she clasped her thin hands and bent yearningly toward him. "Listen to me, my brother. Don't make me say harsh things about an unfortunate girl. Don't force from me what I know. But do you not un-

derstand why I cannot leave you now? It is dread, Ronald, dread lest you become utterly entangled in that—in that girl's toils, and bring shame and ruin to us all."

"Not another word, Grace, not another word!" he exclaimed, angrily drawing away from her. In her pleading she had caught up the cord and tassel of his flowered gown—her own manufacture, her own gift—and he fairly snatched them from her hands. "I will believe no ill of her. I know everything that has taken place to day. I know of her going to town to see that fellow. He is some blood relation, some luckless, reckless outcast from home, and I'll swear to it."

"Reckless and outcast he may be, Ronald, but he is that girl's lover—and I *know* it."

CHAPTER X.

As has been said before, the time that some women —indeed some old women of both sexes—select to tell a fellow the news that is bound to hurt and sting and worry him most, is when he is already nearly knocked out, and therefore cannot get from under. In the excitement of the moment, in her righteous indignation, and in the serene consciousness of the justice of her sacred cause, Miss Maynard had quite forgotten, or at least ignored, the doctor's parting admonition, and the fatal words were said. She knew now that she must prove her words or lose her case. It was no longer a question of how much Ronald might be fretting or how great might be his excitement. He had heard just so much that nothing would satisfy him but the truth and the whole truth as known to her. She must face the music and give her authority for the statement or her last hold on her brother's trust was gone.

There he stood grasping the back of the chair, swaying a little from weakness and shock, staring at her with his fine, bright eyes, now so full of

misery and incredulity and challenge. His face was almost ashen. He choked as at last he spoke:

"He may have been an admirer—any man might; but you—you say, her lover. That, too, he may have been before his break-down. That is no disgrace to her. She is helping him for what he was—not for what he is." And still he gazed imploringly. So many years he had hung upon that sister's words and never doubted her. "You cannot mean—there is anything between them—that—that——"

"I mean that she would follow him to-morrow, if it were not to jail, and that she loves him yet."

For a moment all was silence, except that he was breathing hard. "You have your proofs, of course," he said. "Go on."

"Not to-night, Ronald," she pleaded. "The doctor said——"

"Never mind what the doctor said!—that I was not to be agitated, I suppose, as though I were some hysterical woman. Go on, I say. You can't agitate me any more than you have, and I want to get to the bottom of this at once. Who is your authority? Don't quote Mrs. Turner—that would be too ridiculous."

But fortune came to her aid. There was a sudden ring at the gong bell on the hall door below. The

servant had retired. Mrs. Stannard was still at the Barry's, next door. Miss Maynard had to go down and answer the summons. It was the orderly from headquarters.

"Dispatches still coming in, miss," he said, "and here's one for Mrs. Stannard."

"She's next door—Oh, but wait!" said Miss Maynard, a sudden thought occurring to her. "It may disturb Miss Baird if you go there and ring. Have you anything for Mrs. Barry. I can take both."

"Yes, mum," was the answer, as the young soldier searched through the packet of brown envelopes in his hand.

"I'll be back in a moment, Ronald," she called up the stairs. Then leaving him alone—angering, incredulous, yet miserable, Miss Maynard took the dispatches and, tapping lightly at the door of the neighboring quarters, noiselessly let herself in. Mrs. Stannard met her in the parlor.

"I took these from the orderly," whispered Miss Maynard. "It seemed better that I should come in with them than that he should ring."

But with brief apology, Mrs. Stannard had already torn open the envelope and was reading her dispatch. It was from the major, of course, penciled after the long morning of excitement, and

sent in to the railway by a courier, galloping back with dispatches. It contained merely a few reassuring words. "All well, barring a few casualties already reported. We will be strongly reinforced to-morrow."

Then the major's wife glanced up at her guest. "Mrs. Barry had just dropped off into a doze," she whispered. "I feel sure her message is to the same purport as mine, and that I ought not to rouse her. She can read it by and by. How is Mr. Maynard to-night?"

"He is very nervous and excited," was her reply. "All these rumors from the front make him eager to join his comrades, and I cannot keep him quiet or content. And—your other patient?" she continued, with an upward glance.

"Poor child! She is badly shaken. Mrs. Freeman is sitting with her and striving to soothe her, but she was wide awake awhile ago and very nervous and wretched. I fear she will have little or no sleep this night. Now do not sit up for me, Miss Maynard. Leave the door on the latch, and I'll come in quietly by and by. I shall stay here until after midnight. Mrs. Freeman must go home presently. She cannot stay away from her children all night, you know."

"Oh, I should be most glad if I could be of serv-

ice—either with Mrs. Barry or with—with Miss Baird," faltered Miss Maynard presently. "Ronald really doesn't need me at all."

"It is very kind of you," was the courteous answer, "but everybody realizes your first duty is to your brother. Is there anything he fancies to-night? You know where to find everything we have, so I can depend on you not to wait to ask. Just help yourself."

And then Mrs. Stannard stood as though she wished to bring the conversation to an end and return to her sleeping patient, but Miss Maynard still faltered. She was fencing for time. She did not wish to go home yet. She would have to face Ronald and answer his questions.

And in the midst of the awkward pause a light footfall was heard on the stairs. It was Mrs. Freeman.

"I'm sure dispatches have come," she murmured as she joined them. "What is the news?"

Silently Mrs. Stannard handed her the open paper, which Mrs. Freeman eagerly read.

"Well, then there must be one for me," she whispered. "Would you mind going up and sitting with Nathalie a moment?" she asked of Mrs. Stannard. "I will just hurry home and get what may have come—and a peep at the children, and return in five minutes.

And then from the inner room Mrs. Barry's voice, low and gentle, was heard, demanding news, and Mrs. Stannard hastened to her side.

"*I'll* go to Miss Baird, Mrs. Freeman," whispered Grace Maynard. "Go home by all means, and do not come back if you do not feel like it. I should be glad to sit up with the poor girl. I'm thoroughly accustomed to nursing."

Mrs. Freeman looked troubled and perplexed a moment, listened for sounds from aloft, said vaguely "You're very kind. I—I think the doctor's medicines are taking effect and that she is dozing off. I shan't be any time at all." So saying the little matron let herself out at the front door and hastened down the row. Grace, after listening a moment, slowly and softly ascended the stairs, and noiselessly entered the sick-room.

There in her little white bed lay the patient, her wan face turned away from the dim night-light, nervously tapping the counterpane with her slender hand. She did not turn, she did not speak as the newcomer entered. Only by the restless movement of the hand and an occasional impatient toss and, sigh did she show that she was awake and tormented by her thoughts.

It had been Miss Maynard's intention to speak and explain the situation. The words were on her

lips as she entered the room, but, seeing that no apparent notice was taken of her coming, she hesitated, then decided not to explain or to speak at all until somebody or something should show that Nathalie had discovered it was not Mrs. Freeman. It might be embarrassing, to say the least. The strange girl had never liked her, had always avoided and even shrunk from her. It might only add to her agitation and distress to find a stranger seated by her bedside. Indeed Miss Maynard could think of a dozen reasons for silence, and so, quietly seating herself in the chair left vacant by Mrs. Freeman, she glanced over the little array of vials, glasses, etc., left by the doctor, noted that the shade of the kerosene lamp was carefully adjusted so as to protect the invalid's eyes from the light, and then began a quiet study of the little room and its simple furnishings.

It was very like the one she herself occupied at the Stannards, next door. The two majors were quartered in one big frame house with a party wall, the hallways being on the outer side, and the house itself differing from those in which the captains and lieutenants were quartered in that it had a little extra room on each side under a "lean-to" outside the hall, and that the bedroom on the ground floor was made large and commodious, extending from

the end of the lean-to crosswise to the dining-room. Both Barrys and Stannards preferred their ground floor bedroom because the stairs were steep and narrow, and Mrs. Barry would have chosen it anyway, she being too much of an invalid to climb. When the Barrys moved from Fort Fred Winthrop to Russell, and into their quarters adjoining the Stannards, Nathalie had gratefully accepted the second floor front as her bower, and had fitted it up very prettily and lived there for awhile, as we know, very happily. Then came the episode of the pebble throwing and the bulky, burly stranger who joined her on the prairie walk, and then Nathalie had shown an unlooked-for timidity. She asked Mrs. Barry if she might move into the rear room, whose dormer windows looked out over the prairie, and Mrs. Barry promptly acquiesced, though pointing out to her that, if she had been annoyed or alarmed by anything taking place in front it was even easier for some one to approach the rear than the front window. But Nathalie said that wasn't the reason. It might only be a whim. At all events she could not there, in the back room, hear the band when it played wicked waltz music on Sunday, suggested Mrs. Barry, with a smile. Nathalie thanked her in her heart of hearts for asking no questions, and had told her no lies.

For nearly a week now she had been occupying this rear room looking out over the unlovely landscape of backyard, broken fence, barren prairie and hospital grounds. Yet so wakeful had she become, so troubled her sleep, that she had almost instantly heard the Milesian mouthings of the Empire's bouncer that fateful morning, and hurrying into wrapper and slippers and almost any loose garments, had hastened down to still his clamor and protect her protector from the possibility of a scene.

When Maynard was brought back to the post from his room at the hotel, Major Stannard had promptly placed the front room of his quarters at his disposal as being the one best suited to an invalid, and had hospitably bidden the sister to occupy the one in the rear. She thanked her entertainers very properly, indeed very gratefully, and told them then that just as soon as Ronald was well enough for her to leave him she must hasten back to resume the care of her father. Ronald had now been well enough for her to leave for several days, but Miss Maynard had not begun to pack her trunks, nor was there anything in Mrs. Stannard's manner, even after the intimacy with Mrs. Turner began to glow at white heat, to indicate that she was wearying of her guest. Mrs. Turner, of course, fluttered in and out as though conferring blessings on the rooftree.

It could never by any human possibility occur to her that she would be unwelcome anywhere, and it was she who silenced the faint scruples which Miss Maynard confessed to, and bade her rest assured that the Stannards were only too glad to have her stay and take care of Mr. Maynard, as otherwise they would have to do it themselves.

It was very late—nearly half-past eleven—when Miss Maynard took her seat by Nathalie's bedside and began her survey of the dimly lighted room. A bureau with mirror and toilet-stand was against the wall next the entrance door. A little couch extended across the north end of the room under some bookshelves. The dormer window, daintily draped, was almost at the foot of the couch. The washstand and a little mirror stood near the foot of the bed. Nathalie's trunk, covered with a Navajo blanket, was against the wall beyond the washstand, and quite a tall, wardrobe-like arrangement for skirts and gowns was built against the partition between the front and rear rooms. Everything looked dim and indistinct in the faint light near the bedside, and before seating herself Miss Maynard had moved the chair so that instead of facing the silent patient she had the little table between her and the bed, and here, her hands crossed idly in her lap, she sat some time, glancing about the room, thinking

over with fluttering heart her exciting and troublous interview with Ronald, listening for any sound from the invalid to indicate that her services were needed, thinking of the strange array of circumstances that had brought her to the bedside of this dangerous girl, this unknown maiden who had stolen her brother's heart and lured him from what the sister chose to consider the path of love, honor and duty; and all the time vaguely wondering whether it might not be providential—if it might indeed not have been planned that she should thus be thrown into intimate relations with the invader and destroyer of all her most cherished plans—if in truth it might not have been one of the mysterious dispensations of Divine Providence that she should now be here given full opportunity to strike a blow for right and justice—for gentle Gertrude, patient and uncomplaining, yet suffering at home—for Ralph, her hero lover, silent in the grave—ay, even for her beloved brother's sake, bewitched and blinded as he might be now, would he not later bless and thank her for whatever she now might do to break his chains?

And pondering with rapidly beating heart over all these things, Grace Maynard noted that full half an hour had gone by, and Mrs. Freeman had not returned. It was fate.

Away over at the guardhouse the sentry was calling the midnight hour. There was a stir on the lower floor, and Mrs. Stannard's footsteps were heard as she swept through the parlor into the hall; then, low and cautious, her voice was heard:

"Miss Maynard!"

The young woman quickly arose and hastened to the landing at the head of the stairs.

"Yes, Mrs. Stannard. What is it?"

"I fear something has detained Mrs. Freeman. It is time for Nathalie to take the medicine the doctor left for her—one teaspoonful in a little water from the vial that stands in the saucer. Is she awake?"

"I think so. I will give it to her."

"Thank you ever so much. We are so fortunate in having you here. I will go back to Mrs. Barry then. Don't you sit up after she goes to sleep."

"Oh, I do not mind it in the least, Mrs. Stannard. You know I've been somebody's nurse for years."

With that she returned to the bedside, and now, in her white nightdress, wide-eyed, startled, questioning, Nathalie was leaning on her elbow staring at her.

"Mrs. Freeman had to run home a few minutes ago and left me to give you your medicine, Miss Baird," said Grace promptly, and in soothing tone,

her deft fingers the while pouring out and mixing the draught. "I hope you are feeling better."

She approached and would have passed an arm about the girl's slim shoulders to support her, but Nathalie seemed to draw away.

"I thank you very much," was the nervous, faltering reply, "but indeed, indeed I need no one —no one, and surely you—oh, you must not let me keep you from your brother, Miss Maynard! He needs you far more than I do." She sipped the liquid handed her, and sank back upon the pillow, but her eyes again sought the face of her nurse. "You ought not to be away from him. I heard—they told me—he was not so well."

"I fear—he is not doing as we could wish. He seems— The trouble is he's fretting and unhappy."

"Mrs. Stannard told me," interposed the girl, her eyes taking on a sudden light, her cheeks faintly coloring, her heart beating quickly. "He is longing to go with his regiment, I know, and it chafes him to be held here."

Miss Maynard turned and looked at the wan, wistful little face, so haggard through care and suffering, a sight to move a woman's heart to pity, but for those fatal signs—the sudden color in the soft cheeks, the almost eager light in the kindling

eyes, the nervous, slender fingers clutching at the front of her snow-white gown, hardly whiter than the delicately rounded throat it encircled. Miss Maynard seated herself deliberately at the foot of the bed. "Yes," she said, fixing her eyes on the dim night light, "and there are other things, poor boy."

The other white hand stole to the girl's forehead and covered her eyes, but she remained silent. Presently Miss Maynard continued, speaking in the conventional phraseology she had learned in young lady days. "You see, it is very hard for a young man like him to know that the object of his affections is lying ill, at home, and all through anxiety on his account."

The white hand at the throat had ceased its restless toying, but the heart beneath that snowy bosom was beating tumultuously.

"Indeed, I suppose," said Miss Maynard diffidently, "I ought not to speak of it to a comparative stranger, but everybody here has been so kind to him, perhaps they think him ungrateful for all their goodness, but it isn't that. Duty with his regiment draws him one way, but all the time he is longing to get back, with me, to Gertrude Bonner. She's such a lovely girl, I don't wonder."

CHAPTER XI.

A WEEK rolled by, uneventful enough at Russell, but full of mischief in the field. Hemmed in among the sand hills, and feeling the toils closing about him with fatal pressure by the second day, Yellow Wolf had had recourse to diplomacy, and the aborigine is a past master of the art—a man to whom Metternich and Talleyrand might have bowed in envious contemplation. Sending a squaw to the nearest picket post of the enemy, which happened to be on the north side, the Indian chief asked for a talk, and later that day, in solemn dignity and all the panoply of war paint and feathers, he appeared with a retinue of sub-chiefs, and, gravely dismounting in the circle of officers and soldiers drawn up to meet him, he strode forward, erect and proud and powerful still, a splendid specimen of the plains-bred warrior, then halted in front of the commanding officer, as though bidding him step forward and come the rest of the way. Atherton was not there. He, with his two battalions, Barry and Stannard, was carefully, closely watching the Indian position

from the south and east. It might all only be a trick, a blind, under cover of which the wily chief would attempt to run off his village through the mazes of the sand hills, and, favored by the rapidly descending wings of night, slip away around the right flank of the cavalry and infantry from the White River agencies, and be off and away to join the Northern Cheyennes. If he could make his quarrel theirs, with their united warriors they could laugh at the combined forces in the field.

But out there on the rolling slopes to the north, with the broad valley of the Niobrara stretching miles away toward the horizon, the scene was picturesque and even barbaric. Dismounted from their gayly caparisoned ponies, Yellow Wolf and his principal warriors, fearless, and bearing themselves even now as conquerors, towered in a feathered, painted, brilliant group, the center of a somber ring of soldiery. The chief himself stood a few paces advanced from his followers, and his glance, haughty and almost defiant, was fixed on the gray-haired, mottle-faced officer whom long years of rather inconspicuous service had lifted to the command. The colonel knew little of Indians or of Indian character. Fate had found him at the agencies when the order was telegraphed to "hustle out" every available officer and man and head off

those Southern Cheyennes. He was surrounded by his subordinates, most of whom had spent long years among the Indians and were far better calculated to deal with them, and to one of these, a keen-featured captain of infantry, he turned and whispered.

"What's the old rip waiting for?"

"You must step forward—meet him halfway—shake hands," was the whispered answer. Rather sheepishly, a marked contrast to the savage chief in bearing and demeanor, the colonel, with his thumbs stuck in his waist belt, lounged forward, and, assuming an affable grin, stopped when he neared Yellow Wolf and, slowly withdrawing the right hand from his belt, shifted his quid of tobacco to the other cheek, blushed as though he knew he were making a mess of it, and held forth his hand.

Wolf glanced first at the extended hand and then at the soldier's perturbed face, something almost contemptuous shooting across his own swarthy features. Then slowly raising his right hand he as coolly brought the fingers of the left close to the finger tips of the other, and began in excellent pantomime the motion of pulling off a glove and casting it aside. The whole action was significant. Turning redder yet, the colonel hastily jerked his gauntlet from his knotty digits, and again held

forth his hand. This time the warrior condescended. Striding forward, erect and dignified as ever, he seized the colonel's paw and gave it a wrench that made the veteran wince, whereat some of the younger Indians nearly laughed aloud, and there was an audible titter among the soldiers. This formality concluded the colonel proceeded to shake hands with each of the warriors in the suite of Yellow Wolf, saying, as he had heard brother officers greet the Ogallala braves at the fort, "How, Colah," which wasn't Cheyenne at all, but Sioux, or a colloquial modification thereof. However, it seemed to pass muster among the visitors, with whom certain others of the officers shook hands and exchanged cordial greetings. They were old acquaintances.

And then at a word from Yellow Wolf his followers seated themselves in the arc of a circle, all save one, an Indian as thoroughbred-looking as the chief, who remained close to the latter's side, who bent attentive ear to the words spoken in low voice by his leader, and then addressed himself in excellent English to the colonel:

"Yellow Wolf has come to talk with the commander of the white soldiers. But we have no meat. We are poor and hungry. Our children cry for food."

"Order dinner for the dozen, colonel," whispered the captain, coming to his side. "There can be no talk till you do." And over an hour was consumed while the chief and his friends were being fed and comforted, a proceeding that took three times the amount of bacon and hard-tack, coffee and sugar that would have satisfied the stomachs of many a hungry white man. Meantime the sun was sinking toward the horizon, and old Stannard, with Atherton's permission, came spurring up from the southeast to inquire, as he did in terse language, what the devil was the matter, and why in the devil's abiding place they were wasting so much valuable time. Being informed that Yellow Wolf had declared himself poor and hungry, and had begged for food as preliminary to the council, Stannard ripped out an explosive protest. "The old scoundrel is only playing you!" said he to the colonel. "He's sparring for wind and time, don't you see? He knows we're right in on top of him now, by dint of two days' siege work, and that we could attack now with every prospect of giving them a thrashing. He's just standing you off until sunset, colonel. For God's sake, send him to the right about. Tell him the talk is over, and that we mean to attack at once. If you don't, he'll slip out somewhere to-night, sure!"

But the colonel felt his honor involved. He couldn't in good faith send them back now. He'd hear what the chief had to propose and, if it wasn't satisfactory, send him back to his sand holes and pitch in.

"You can't," said Stannard again. He had had years of dealings with the red men and knew their tricks and their manners. "Next thing you know he'll stipulate for a peace smoke; can't talk until after smoke, and he'll smoke half an hour before he'll say a word." Stannard glared disgustedly around at the silent officers as much as to say, "You know this as well as I do, gentlemen. Why don't you warn the colonel? Why didn't you do it?" But they were silent or turned away in visible embarrassment. Some of them *had* warned the colonel and even argued with him. The old fellow looked vexed and badgered in good earnest now. He seemed to have known Stannard many a year, as was indeed the case, and so would listen to far more from him than he would from his own people.

All the time this excited talk was going on, some little distance to one side the baker's dozen of Indians were squatted on the ground busily plying fingers and spoons, only occasionally casting furtive glances at the group. Around them, in bigger, broader semicircle, nearly three hundred troops—

infantry and cavalry—stood resting on their arms, watching the scene and occasionally indulging in rough frontier chat and chaff. But the interpreter knew Stannard of old, marked every word that he said, and in low tone warned his chief, who glanced at Stannard's sturdy figure and snapping eyes with no little concern in his face, then helped himself to more of the bacon.

Just as Stannard prophesied, more than an hour was taken up by the feast. By that time every scrap was eaten, and Yellow Wolf bade his interpreter petition for more, and again he began, "We are poor and hungry," and pleaded for renewed supplies, but this time the colonel bade the infantry captain speak for him, and speak he did in no uncertain tone. Not another mouthful until the talk was over, then they'd see about it. Another conference followed between Wolf and his interpreter, conducted with vast gesticulation, for, like the Arapahoe, the Cheyenne language is one so guttural and uncouth that it is said two Indians of the same tribe cannot understand each other in the dark. They must have recourse to gestures.

And then, just as Stannard said, the wily old fencer for time came up with a proposition for a smoke. No conference could be held without one. But again: "We are poor and hungry. We have no tobacco."

They had their pipes, however, and these were speedily filled, lighted, and with deep guttural "ughs" and sighs of contentment the squatting warriors drew deep clouds of the fragrant vapor into the lungs, apparently, and exhaled the smoke in long blue jets, Yellow Wolf insisting on a far greater ceremony, and passing his beautifully ornamented pipe from lip to lip of those nearest him. Half an hour was consumed in this way, and the sun was growing redder and sinking lower, and the old colonel was waxing wroth and fidgeting here and there; and then, and not till then, when the great orb was barely half an hour high, did Yellow Wolf motion the throng to fall back and give him room; and not until the soldiers returned to their places and the warriors squatted at a respectful distance from their chief, and the colonel and his officers took their stand facing the Indian leader, did that savage dignitary advance a step or two and begin. He dropped his blanket from his shoulders with a superb gesture, and then, clad only in breechclout, moccasins, paint and barbaric necklace, armlets, leglets, and magnificent war bonnet of eagles' feathers, proudly swaying both arms in the wild grace of his savage oratory, Yellow Wolf began. Every forty or fifty words he would pause, and the interpreter would do his best.

"Long years ago," said Wolf, "this beautiful land teemed with buffalo, elk, and deer, and their fathers led them (the Indians) to the chase. The white man was unknown. Their young men were brave, their maidens pure and beautiful, their people strong and prosperous and happy. Their foemen trembled before them and fled at their coming. They were lords of the soil, and knew no master but the Great Spirit. Then came the white man, tempting them with gifts, drugging them with fire-water, stealing away their maidens, slaying their young men. We could have slayed the despoiler, but we would not, for we had welcomed the white man and loved him as a brother. Then came lying paper chiefs—not warriors—who told us to sign papers and we would have cattle and horses, wagons and meat and flour and coffee and sugar like the white man; and then they told us we had sold our lands and must go. Go where? They led us far away from the wild hills and haunts of our fathers. They drove us down among the buffalo soldiers—the Negro Indians—the no-warrior nations of the South, where our young men sickened and died, where our maidens were poisoned, where the great father's agent starved and cheated us, and when we appealed to him, put our chiefs in prison and threatened our young men. At last he brought soldiers to shoot and kill; and

then we sought the plains, poor and starving as we were—sought our kindred here at the north, at the old, old hunting grounds; and we are trailed and followed and fought. Our young men are shot again, and our old men are dying of weakness and famine. We are helpless, we are wronged. Look at me," he said, with magnificent gesture, "I am poor and naked. Why are these soldiers here? Why are we threatened and fought and killed, we who have done no wrong?" And Wolf looked grandly about him. "I have done," he said, and his followers gutturally grunted their applause, and all eyes reverted to the colonel, just as the red rim of the sun reached the horizon and turned his mottled face to fire as he confronted it.

"Yellow Wolf," said he, "your ideas of right and wrong and ours don't agree. I don't know anything about your row with the agent. I do know that when you broke away your people killed him and half a dozen white men at the reservation, and stabbed and killed the schoolmistress who had never been anything but kind to your children. Then you started on your raid, and you've made a trail of blood every inch of the way from the territory to the sand hills. Now we've got you and our orders are to take you back to the Indian Territory, and we're going to do it. My advice to you is,

surrender your arms and ponies and go back peacefully. If you don't we'll lick hell out of you, and that's all there is about it. Now go get your guns and horses and hand them over. That's all I've got to say."

In point of oratory there was no question which, the red man or the white, had the better of it. In point of logic, it depends upon the point of view.

Slowly the chief arose, and striding forward once more essayed to speak, but the old colonel, waving him back as he turned impatiently away, said, "I'll listen to no more. I've said my say," and this the interpreter did not have to explain. But Yellow Wolf was not lightly to be shaken off. "It is too late to-night," he pleaded. "See, the sun has dipped below the mountains. The night draws over the earth." (It was as though he was spreading a blanket over the prairie sod.) "We are poor. We have no lights. To-morrow—to-morrow when the sun is one hour high we will come forth with our guns and horses—all we have, and lay them at the feet of the great father. Let me go back and bid our women cease their trembling, our children hush their cries, for the white chief promises that his soldiers shall not harm them this night. Yellow Wolf and his warriors will go where the white chief may say. We will fight no more.

This, too, was promptly interpreted, and the colonel wavered. He looked to Captain Lee, his trusted adviser, and Lee shook his head. "It's taking chances," said he. The colonel glanced about the circle of grave faces in the gathering twilight. The little cook fires on the slopes burned redder. Some faces were doubtful, some appealing. At least it meant no attack on a desperate band in a strong position. At least it meant that there would be no ghastly list of killed and wounded to send by courier to the station. This seemed to weigh with the old soldier, so heavy had been the losses of the troops within the two years gone by, and at last he whirled about.

"All right. So be it," he said. "To-morrow, then, when the sun is one hour high—all arms and ponies. Meantime, Yellow Wolf, you and your people are to stay just where you are."

"Will the great chief give us food for our people?" asked the interpreter, in accents that were almost Hibernian in their flattery. The colonel hesitated. He was a merciful man, but Lee spoke promptly. "Tell him they shall have abundance—a feast for all hands to-morrow morning, colonel, but not a morsel to-night. They're not suffering—any of them."

And at this, without another word, with slow,

cumbrous dignity, Yellow Wolf mounted and, followed by his sub chiefs, rode slowly and solemnly away. Long before they had reached the little butte from whose shelter they had emerged more than two hours before, only as dim, shadowy, specter-like forms did they appear against the southward slopes of the rolling earth waves.

That night Atherton was ordered to extend his lines as far to the west as possible and have patrols scouring the country west of the Indian position, while the cavalry from the north threw out similar parties from their right flank. But long before ten o'clock word came in that the country was all cut up by deep ravines or gulches, with precipitous sides. It was dark and moonless. They couldn't communicate. Venturesome troopers, who dismounted and slid into those apparently bottomless depths, reported that the opposite wall was just as steep. Even if they got down into them there was no getting out on the opposite side, and no telling how many more there were just like them. Both commands felt out toward the west as far as they could and strove to close the nearly mile-wide gap on that side, but to very little purpose. One daring young corporal, striving to find a way in the blackness of the night, was suddenly plunged forward by the misstep of his snorting horse, and he and that

luckless charger rolled over the edge of the cliff and were found by comrades who ventured down afoot with lights, crushed to death on the rocks below. Not until long after midnight did Atherton and Stannard turn in, and then it was with a shake of the head that augured ill for the success of the plan.

The night went by in silence, broken only by the yelping of the coyotes far out on the prairie, and the occasional snorting of horses and braying of pack mules. The dawn came, slow and chill, and at the first flush of day the troopers were huddling about the cook fires, eager for their mug of coffee. Brighter grew the skies. One by one the stars to the west faded from view and, just before the sun came peeping over the low, distant hillocks at the east, old Sergeant Donnelly came riding up to Colonel Atherton's tent with gloom in his eyes.

"What is it, sergeant?" asked Atherton, as the veteran trooper dismounted.

"Nothin', sir, but that I've just come in from the extreme left, and it's my belief the whole outfit sneaked away through one of them damned ruts last night, and is halfway to the Niobrara by this time."

And this proved to be true. When the sun was an hour high the White River command was in full

chase, northwestward, for the arms and ponies that were not delivered at that hour, while philosophic Barry and hard-swearing Stannard were riding along with their silent chief, following the general movement.

And this was the news that reached Russell the fifth day of the week referred to, followed next day by the tidings that General Crook had corraled Yellow Wolf at the northern reservation, that Atherton, Barry and Stannard were marching homeward, and all would be there within another seven days; and that was why Mr. Maynard, although he was now almost able to take the field, did not do so; but, having secured his sister's homeward-bound ticket, had planned to escort her to the station on the following day, despite Mrs. Turner's plea that she might wait just a few days longer until the troops came home; and Mrs. Turner needed friends and allies now, for war had been declared by Mrs. Gregg. "Somebody," said Mrs. Turner, "has been mean enough to tell her something."

But Miss Maynard was to have started on Thursday, and all preparations had been made; but when Thursday morning came there was dismay and consternation on every face along officers' row. Three sets of quarters had been robbed some time between midnight and reveille, and there was not a clue to the perpetrators.

CHAPTER XII.

Opportunities for theft in garrison are or were illimitable. People never thought of bolting their doors by day, and, as to money, silverware, jewelry, and the like, women who possessed such property rarely placed it under lock and key. Once in a long while some servant was caught peculating and was escorted beyond the limits of the military reservation and forbidden to return. But never before in the history of the cavalry had the officers' quarters been entered by professional burglars, and there was no question that professionals only could have done the deed with the neatness and dispatch evident in this case.

Yet what was there to prevent it? The garrison proper was far afield. One attenuated company of infantry was all that was left to do duty at Russell. Only two sentries were posted on each relief. Seven privates constituted the daily guard, and even then the men were growling because they "only had three and sometimes two nights abed." One of these sentries was stationed at the guard-

house where quite a number of prisoners were confined. The other paced the long east front of the post, trying to keep an eye on the coal piles, the ordnance, quartermaster's and commissary storehouses, the post generally, which he couldn't see, and the front gate. All the north side of the post, back of the hospital and surgeon's quarters and all the northwest and southwest sides of the lozenge-shaped enclosure lay open to marauders, for there were not two back gates along officers' row that would readily close,or that, being closed, could not readily be forced. It was perfectly practicable for any parties intent on pillage to drive out from town, and, keeping well away over the level prairie, to make a wide circuit and approach the post from the north or northwest. They could then be beyond sight or hearing of any sentry, could run their wagons back of the quarters to be entered, load up with their booty, and be off again with no fear of capture and little of interruption. Even should some of the women or children be aroused, there were not five houses where men servants or "strikers" slept, and they knew, did these shrewd professionals, how to manage suddenly awakened women.

But how did they know just what houses to rob, and just where to find the valuables in each case? The tracks showed that a two-horse wagon had been

used, and that two men beside the driver were engaged in the work. Everybody in town was aware of the fact that the well-to-do or fairly wealthy officers at Russell were Colonel Atherton, Major Barry, Captains Freeman, Gregg, Truscott and Ray, the latter having married an heiress. But the marauders never disturbed the colonel's house. All the silver had gone to the bank in town and her ladyship to Chicago, and there, besides, Mrs. Atherton's coachman and two other servants slept; and furthermore the band quarters were but a short pistol-shot away. They steered clear of Truscott's where baby Jack was teething and keeping his anxious and devoted mother awake long hours each night, and where by her bedside hung a crafty little Smith & Wesson she knew well how to use. They steered clear of her devoted friends and next door neighbors, the Rays, for there slept a doughty ex-trooper, Hogan by name, now their coachman and man-of-all-work, in his little arsenal of a room back of the kitchen. But they had dared to enter, through a rear window apparently, the quarters of Major Barry, where a night light burned dimly all through the hours of darkness, and had carried away the basket of household silver secreted under Mrs. Barry's bed, and the jewelry from her toilet stand. They must have looked with covetous eyes

on the beautiful rings that adorned her slender fingers, but thought best not to attempt that—or did they even dare make that essay? Mrs. Barry was aroused from unusually deep slumber by the sensation that some one had lifted her hand from the counterpane, found herself in darkness, her night lamp smoking as though recently extinguished, heard the boards creaking in the parlor or hall, and had asked, "Is that you, Nathalie?" and receiving no response believed it all imagination; and wondering what made her so drowsy, had slept heavily until aroused by the servant in the morning, with the startling announcement that the silver and her jewelry were gone. Then Nathalie came rushing down the stairs, wide-eyed, and deathly white, had glanced almost in horror at the empty basket which the cook had brought in from the backyard, and had then thrown herself upon her knees at the foot of the bed and burst into an agony of tears.

And before visiting the Barrys' the professionals had called at Gregg's and Freeman's, carrying off a watch, some silver and many trinkets from each, and never even disturbing the healthful slumbers of the occupants. Captain Gregg's desk was forced and about one hundred dollars in treasury notes had disappeared, but most of Mrs. Freeman's silver and money were safe in the bank. She never "enter-

tained" when her lord was in the field, and this proved her salvation. But the gentle little woman was sorely grieved over the loss of her beautiful watch, which always lay at night on the little stand by the head of her bed. As for Mrs. Gregg, her grief was almost tragic. Two young ladies from town were her guests at the time. They were sleeping together in the room adjoining hers. Nothing of theirs was disturbed, while her watch, rings, bracelets, locket, pins, and heaven knows how much frumpery, together with every ounce of the household silver, had been spirited off. The foolish matron had not thought of such a possibility as this. She loved display, and even their recent reverses had taught no lesson of permanent value.

Hardly had Mrs. Barry been told of her loss—she was still in a half bewildered state, passing her hand over her heavy eyelids and striving to rouse herself from the stupor that seemed to overcome her—when there came a violent bang at the front door and Mrs. Turner bounced into the hall. Catching sight of Nathalie at the foot of the bed, she plunged impetuously into the room. "Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Barry! Have you heard the news?" she cried. "Mrs. Gregg and Mrs. Freeman have been robbed of every earthly thing they own. Why! what's the matter—you too? And Miss Baird? Oh,

I'm so sorry. And you heard nothing—you suspect nobody?" And, under cover of the volley of questions addressed to the lady of the house by her excited visitor, Nathalie stole, sobbing, from the room. When Mrs. Turner would have questioned her the girl was gone.

Even in the excitement and shock consequent upon the discovery of her own losses, Mrs. Barry had noticed Nathalie's extreme agitation and her escape from the room. When, therefore, Mrs. Turner's eyes dilated with eager curiosity and she began rapid queries as to the cause of Nathalie's sudden exit, the lady was quite prepared to parry. "Nathalie has only been able to leave her bed within the last two days, Mrs. Turner. You know she's been wretchedly ill, and she is still so weak and nervous that Bridget's sudden and exciting announcement shocked her greatly."

"The poor child!" cried Mrs. Turner. "Do let me go up to her and see if I cannot do something for her."

"Better not," answered Mrs. Barry. "I've found Nathalie always more rapidly recover when left to herself. You can do something for me though," she hurried on, anxious to silence further questioning and to rid herself of an importunate guest who was very much in the way. "Will you ask Captain

Walters to come to see me this morning, and Mrs. Stannard to join me as soon as she can?"

"Why, of course, Mrs. Barry. Anything you wish; but I haven't begun to tell you about the robbery yet. Just think of it. All Mrs. Gregg's silver is gone, as well as all her lovely rings and things. It seems like a judgment on her for being so careless. I'm sure Captain Gregg has warned her a dozen times not to leave her valuables about. Don't you think so?"

"That it was a judgment on her, Mrs. Turner? Well, if upon her, why not upon me?"

"Oh, but you didn't lose half what she did—besides, you're very different. What did they take from you? Not those heavenly sapphires, I'm glad to see," and Mrs. Turner's pretty, empty head was twisting in every direction in her eagerness to appraise the loss.

"No, not my rings, but a basket of silver that we valued for old time's sake, and some loose trinkets from the bureau. I fear it's gone for good," said the kind-hearted woman, with a sigh, "yet how much greater is Mrs. Gregg's loss. I'm so sorry for her."

"Oh, so am I, and not a man here of our regiment to help in any way except Mr. Maynard, and he's half-invalid yet and a mere boy." Disparagement

of Maynard in Mrs. Turner's liquid drawl had followed speedily upon his defection. Finally, finding that Nathalie wouldn't come down so long as she remained, and that Mrs. Barry would not encourage her to go up, Mrs. Turner hastened away in hopes of breaking the news elsewhere. She looked wistfully into Mrs. Gregg's open doorway as she hastened down the row, and longed to enter and to ascertain what was really the extent of her loss, and whether she had heard anybody, and had any suspicions. One of the young lady visitors was at the door at the moment, chatting with Mr. Maynard, who, leaning on a stout cane, and looking rather white and solemn, had evidently just come out from a conference. To him Mrs. Turner bowed coquettishly, and gave a forgiving glance at the girl, but the latter returned only an embarrassed nod and did not speak. Everybody knew that there had been a dreadful row between the ladies within the week gone by. They had met at the Raymonds' where Mrs. Gregg flushed angrily at sight of her former friend and rival, and refused the outstretched hand. Mrs. Turner had demanded, with a world of injured innocence in her tones, instant explanation of such unsisterly, not to say rude and unjustifiable conduct, and, nothing loath, Mrs. Gregg gave it to her. She had heard from *excellent authority* that Mrs.

Turner had said that she, Mrs. Gregg, was living *most extravagantly*, and far beyond her husband's means—that all manner of tradesmen were bombarding her with bills, bills, bills, and nothing but Colonel Atherton's interposition had saved her husband, Captain Gregg, from being ordered before a court for non-payment of debts that Mrs. Gregg had contracted.

Fanny Turner was promptly, properly and virtuously indignant in her denial of the story. Never had she said to a living soul what she was represented as having said. She had never *presumed* to criticise Mrs. Gregg. All she said was that she heard that Mrs. Gregg's means were greatly straightened since the failure of their bank, and she wondered that people should be so inconsiderate as to send in their bills at such a time, when, if they would only wait, Captain Gregg would see that they were all settled. Everybody knew he was as honest as he could be, and all she ever said about court-martial was, that there had been cases where officers were brought to trial for not paying their bills, and she knew how dreadfully Mrs. Gregg would feel, etc., etc. It was all very glib and plausible, and the moistened eyes and flushed cheeks of the fair speaker might have pleaded for her too, but, unluckily, she and Mrs. Gregg had had their little day of devoted

intimacy and unbounded confidences in the past; Mrs. Gregg knew how she could talk; had heard from one of her lady friends of Mrs. Turner's theories and statements regarding the receipted bills, and had been referred to others who also had heard, whereat, bristling with indignation, Mrs. Gregg investigated and dragged the truth to light. Over the scene of upbraiding, denials, recriminations and counter accusations that occurred at Mrs. Raymond's that afternoon, let us draw a veil. All poor Turner's forebodings were amply justified. The ladies parted with the determination of never speaking to each other again, and, what really was serious, Mrs. Gregg wrote a long, long letter to her husband, setting forth all the hateful, abominable things Fanny Turner had said; and, just as Turner had predicted, another old comrade and friend with whom he had campaigned all over the country, marched and scouted, skirmished and starved, shared his last drop or crust or blanket many and many a time, now coldly avoided him, and Turner's sad, sallow face grew sadder still as the two battalions came jogging homeward. There was no need to ask what was the matter, no use in trying to explain or condone. "It is all my fault," was the burden of his song. "I should have corrected that tendency long years ago. It is too late now."

Accustomed as she was to spats of this character, however, Mrs. Turner still sorely missed the close companionship of some garrison friend and intimate this electric day. Even Mrs. Raymond, slighted and snubbed for the new-found friend, now refused to be cajoled back to a semblance of the old relations. She was almost as icy as Mrs. Gregg had been volcanic. There was no longer for Mrs. Turner the rapture of the first bloom of her fellowship with Miss Maynard. That Mohawk maiden had failed to warmly champion her cause when she fled to her in tears after the battle at the Raymonds and told her side of the story. Mrs. Turner had sobbed out something to the effect that, being so much younger and less experienced than Mrs. Gregg, she had incautiously confided certain statements to Mrs. Raymond and one or two ladies whom she supposed trustworthy, and they had betrayed her. Miss Maynard innocently remarked that she had always supposed Mrs. Turner was older than Mrs. Gregg, which stopped the flow of Mrs. Turner's tears and turned on a flood of rebuke, which Miss Maynard interrupted by saying: "You are surely as old as I am, Mrs. Turner; if not, you must have been married before you were twelve." Miss Maynard, it must be remembered, was herself engaged to be married in the war days, and could not be fooled on chronology.

Take it altogether, Fanny Turner had been having hard lines for a whole week. She was really glad to hear Miss Maynard was going home. There had sprung up a coolness, due partially to the difference as to their respective ages, but due even more to the consciousness that, between them, another deep wrong had been done in that garrison, and each wished to lay the blame upon the other, even while conscience dinned "Thou art the woman" into her own unwilling ears.

In leading Nathalie Baird to believe that Maynard was virtually bound to Gertrude Bonner, Grace Maynard felt few qualms of conscience. She was a religious woman. She believed herself to be a model of truth and propriety and justice. She had persuaded herself that in course of time Ronald's eyes would be open to Gertrude's rural graces and domestic virtues, and that then he would see his duty clear and propose marriage forthwith. She had always intended that they should marry, and that being her intention, she had readily persuaded herself that it was also theirs; if not, it ought to be. Gertrude certainly would think of no other man. Poor child! she had never seen anything of the world outside of her native county, and Ronald was to her the most delectable young man she ever dreamed of; but Ronald had seen many and many a

girl far prettier and brighter, more attractive in every way than Gertrude, and his liking for her was due to that least complimentary of sentiments, where woman is concerned—old acquaintance sake. This he had flatly told his sister when it was settled that she should return to her distant home and resume the care of their invalid father, and still her heart was set and determined. She had told Nathalie Baird in so many words that her brother was engaged to or in love with Gertrude Bonner, and she believed that in maintaining this statement, and using every means in her power to bring that match about, and wean her brother from the fascinations of this pink-cheeked New England girl, she was doing a praiseworthy and proper thing.

But, on the contrary, she was tormented by the thought that in speaking of Nathalie to her brother she had asserted that which she did not know and did not believe to be a fact—that the ruffianly stranger, who had given them all so much trouble before finally vanishing, was actually Nathalie Baird's lover. She strove to stifle the still small voice by saying to herself that Mrs. Turner believed as she did, but Mrs. Turner did not believe it or think of it until Miss Maynard told her of the mysterious meetings on the prairie and down at the end of the row, and of Maloney's clamorous call

at reveille. These had Mrs. Turner lost no time in peddling about the garrison, so that poor Nathalie, with her big, pleading eyes and pathetic white face, was just beginning to move around again after her illness only to find herself shunned by more than half the women at Russell. She had almost determined to ask that Mrs. Stannard should advocate her being sent home, when the burglary took place and drove her almost frantic, with fear and grief and shame, back to her room again.

There she was, two days later, kneeling by her little white bed, deaf to earthly sound, dumb with speechless misery, when Mrs. Stannard herself climbed the stairs and knelt and took her in her arms.

"Nathalie, child," she murmured, "you must not give way to such dread. I know whom you suspect of having had a hand in the robberies. Even if it were so, dear, you would be blameless——"

"Mrs. Stannard—Mrs. Stannard!" wailed the girl, as she threw herself upon her bosom. "What else *can* I believe? And to think that I should bring such incessant trouble to those who have been so good to me!"

"Hush, Nathalie," was the loving answer, as the girl's sobbing broke forth afresh. "Mrs. Barry needs you sadly this morning. She knows the

cause of your distress, and she begs you to come to her. Let me help you dress now, and then you must try to eat something. Let me tell you: Hogan, Mrs. Ray's coachman, followed the trail into town, that same morning, and saw the marshal there, or somebody. Captain Walters drives in again right after guard mounting to-day, and the police feel sure they can recapture the silver, even if they do not get the thieves and the jewelry. Two strange men were at the Railroad House that morning, and neither of them was the one they call Boston."

But the girl seemed past comfort. Passively she allowed herself to be aided to dress, bathing her swollen eyelids and doing what she could to banish the signs of her excessive grief. Humbly she waited upon her loving friend, as the latter lay upon the couch, sipping her tea and nibbling at the dainty breakfast prepared for her; and this was her occupation when Captain Walters, the infantry officer temporarily in command of the fort, was announced and was shown into the little parlor.

He was a man of some fifty years, grizzled, worn, and somewhat soured in service. He had seen younger men plucking the plums of promotion over his head, and he could not forgive it in fate that he should still be only a captain, with every prospect of

there remaining for ten years longer, when men years his junior were his superior officers. His one lieutenant, they said, led a dog's life of it. His wife was, happily for her, translated to realms where promotion cometh not from the east nor from the west, nor is supposed to be a matter of consequence to any one. Captain Walters had been aroused before sick call on the eventful morning by the news of the robberies, and was properly scandalized at such things occurring under his command. He had held brief consultation with the non-commissioned officers of his guard, with the doctor and others, especially his adjutant, Mr. Warner, had inspected the wagon tracks and footprints, had called on Mesdames Gregg and Freeman, had heard Hogan's statement, had questioned Mr. Maynard about the burly "tough" whom he had unseated and tumbled the day in town, and had finally, on the second morning after the robberies, been closeted with the local chief of police. What happened in that conversation can best be judged by what followed. Leaving him at the office, Captain Walters stumped down the line, knocked at Mrs. Turner's door, and disturbed that innocent matron at breakfast, but begged a few words none the less. Then he tramped back and asked for Miss Maynard at Stannard's door, and both Maynard and his sister came

forth, and with some embarrassment the captain managed to say it was Miss Maynard with whom he desired a word in private. It was a white, scared face with which she confronted her brother when the brief interview was over, but, vouchsafing no explanation, ran hurriedly up the stairs.

Then the captain rang at Barrys' and was shown into the pretty parlor where Mrs. Barry reclined, with Mrs. Stannard and Miss Baird hovering about her, and here his embarrassment became something painful. He answered their polite greetings in most awkward fashion, and refused the chair that was tendered him. At last he blurted forth what he had to say, and, almost at his first words, Mrs. Stannard threw her arm around Nathalie's waist and drew her tight to her side.

"Mrs. Barry, I have a most painful duty to perform, but I cannot shirk it. The police have positive proof of what they say, and they tell me that there is one person here at the post who not only can tell who the robbers are, but *where* they are, and that is—this unfortunate young lady—Miss—a—Miss Baird."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE east-bound train that day left without one of its promised passengers—Miss Maynard. She was needed, said the civil authorities, as a possible witness in the robbery case. Wild, stirring, marvelous was the rumor that went from house to house before eleven o'clock, that Mrs. Barry's companion and *protégée*, the lovely New England girl, had been accused by the police of guilty knowledge of, if not complicity in, the burglaries, and that, though not arrested and taken to town, she was under surveillance and confined to the house. One man when he heard it boiled over with wrath and misery. That was Ronald Maynard. Scorning his sister's arguments and entreaties, he had limped across the piazza, rung at the Barrys' door and begged to be admitted. He found Mrs. Stannard tearful, but calm and collected, Mrs. Barry reclining on her couch, her white hands gently toying with the glossy, wavy blonde masses of hair that rippled all down over poor Nathalie's back and shoulders, as she knelt there, her face buried in Mrs. Barry's

bosom, abandoned to her grief. She did not even hear or heed the bell, did not know who had come, or that any one had come, until she heard these words:

"Mrs. Stannard—Mrs. Barry—I've heard this most cruel accusation, and I've come to say I don't believe a word of it, and I won't rest until I've got at the truth."

The servant, after admitting him, still stood at the parlor door, looking doubtfully after the young officer and glancing inquiringly at Mrs. Stannard as though to ask if she had done right or wrong. Mrs. Barry, without turning or disturbing Nathalie, held out her thin white hand, a smile of welcome and pleasure on her face, and as Maynard stepped forward and eagerly clasped the proffered hand, he bowed low over it, and over the beautiful, rippling tresses of the girl's humbled head. His eyes, clouded with distress and sympathy, gazed one moment into those of the invalid, and then sought the kneeling form. No woman that ever lived, unbereft of the faculties God has given her, could have failed to read the infinite yearning in the brave young face, the love and tenderness and longing that shone in his fine, truthful eyes. Mrs. Barry read and saw unerringly, and her heart went out to him as she drew the sobbing girl closer to her side.

Nathalie, too, seemed conscious of his nearer presence. She was striving to check the violence of her emotion and had instinctively moved a little, as though to make room for him, or possibly to draw a trifle away. His knee was almost at her shoulder.

Mrs. Stannard half turned. "It is all right," she said in a low tone to the still lingering servant. "You may go;" and slowly and almost reluctantly the maid withdrew. They heard her voice the next moment in the dining-room, as though answering a question. "Lieutenant Maynard," she said, "to see Mrs. Barry," whereat Mrs. Stannard looked in some surprise into the room beyond, but no one was then in sight.

"It was the cook, I fancy," said Mrs. Barry. "She usually comes to me about this time each day to get her orders, and being a very particular, not to say superior person, she did not wish, in her kitchen attire, to come into the presence of gentlemen. Bridget is quite a swell when she goes to town. Do sit down awhile, Mr. Maynard. We are all glad to see you," and again her arm seemed more closely to encircle Nathalie. "It is good to hear your voice again, especially when you say such good words." Only too willingly Maynard found a chair and drew it toward the couch. Nathalie

made an effort to rise, but Mrs. Barry held her firmly, murmuring some encouraging words in her ear. Then Mrs. Stannard came forward again.

"I think I will go over home awhile now and look after matters there. Then I'll come to you again, Mrs. Barry. Mr. Maynard will have a chance to talk with you while I'm gone."

Again Mrs. Barry held out her hand. "You have been ever so good to us, and we'll be glad indeed when you can come back, both of us. Would you mind telling cook to make a little tea now for Nathalie." The kneeling girl shook her head in protest, but unavailingly. Mrs. Stannard disappeared through the dining-room door and went to the kitchen just beyond. She returned in a moment.

"Bridget isn't there, but I told Mary. She thinks Bridget may have gone upstairs a moment. She left her in the dining-room. Mary will make the tea."

"I didn't hear her go up," said Mrs. Barry, "but it may be. She's the quietest creature I ever had about the house, despite her apparent weight. Thank you ever so much, Mrs. Stannard. I suppose there is no use in our writing to our respective majors again. They reach Laramie to-day, do they not, Mr. Maynard?"

"I think so," was the answer. "Isn't there a map of Nebraska in the major's den? I can show you just how they are marching in. The doctor and I figured it out on his map this morning before —before we heard of this," and again he glanced at Nathalie's bowed head.

"It's hanging there on the east wall, between the windows," said Mrs. Barry, and rising and stepping quickly across the hall, Maynard entered the narrow apartment in the "lean-to" which Barry used as his study, office, library and general loafing place. It opened into Mrs. Barry's bedroom, as did also the little hall. A pair of heavy Navajo blankets hung in the connecting doorway; the floor was covered with a thick carpet, underneath which were several thicknesses of newspaper—the universal expedient of the old frontier days for keeping out the Wyoming gales. The windows still wore their winter battens of cotton, and the narrow den was as snug and secure from draughts as any house at Russell could be made, and yet something had occurred to disturb those Navajo curtains within five seconds, for one of them was swinging back as though it had just been blown in by a puff of wind. Maynard looked at it in some surprise, but the heavy folds quickly settled to rest. He did not consider it his province to search for the cause in

Mrs. Barry's room. The rear window might be open, or the kitchen door which stood beyond the arched entrance to the dining-room. Lifting the map from its hook he turned to retrace his steps, and right at the foot of the stairs met Nathalie. With bowed head and averted eyes she brushed by him and hastened up to her room.

"She was so agitated and distressed, Mr. Maynard," explained his hostess, as the young fellow returned to the parlor, "that I had to let her go to bathe her face. She'll be down again before long."

But this proved delusive. Mrs. Stannard remained a few moments to look over the map while Maynard pointed out where the battalion had been engaged with the Cheyennes, the line of flight of the latter to the northern agencies, and the probable homeward course of the regiment, and then she took her departure. Mary, the maid, presently came in with tea and was told to take it up to Miss Baird, which she did, and on her return was asked if Bridget was upstairs as had been reported, and Mary, with a puzzled face, said no, neither was she in her own room back of the kitchen. But a minute later, after the maid had retired, Bridget's voice was heard in the kitchen, and speedily she, herself, approached the parlor door, but stood respectfully

and modestly back in the dining-room and inquired with great deference of manner, was Mrs. Barry needing anything?

"Not now, Bridget," was the answer. "I needed you a few moments ago to make some tea for Miss Baird."

"I'm so sorry, mum," said the invisible domestic; "I had just stepped over to Mrs. Gregg's a moment, after coming in to see if anything was wanted. Isn't there something I can do now, ma'am?"

"Nothing, thank you, Bridget, unless you'll step up to Miss Baird and see if you cannot suggest something to coax her appetite;" whereupon Bridget's footsteps were heard passing through the bedroom into the hall and so on up the stairs, the goddess of the kitchen thereby coyly defeating the possibility of being seen in the garb of her servitude, as well as avoiding the parlor as a thoroughfare—not so easy a matter to teach to frontier "help."

"A most excellent, faithful creature," said Mrs. Barry to her visitor, "and so good tempered. She's worth six of her predecessors."

"I hope she will prevail on Miss Baird to eat something," said Maynard anxiously. "She seems to have been so ill for days and weeks."

"Poor child, yes," was the answer. "And she

has had enough to drive a girl distracted. Of course, Mr. Maynard, you must have heard something of her singular adventures of late."

"I have both seen and heard something, Mrs. Barry," was the prompt reply, "and I'll stake my all it's—it's to her credit, not to her discredit, if anything. Surely that man must be some kin of her people. It cannot be anything else."

He was glad of a chance to champion her cause, glad to show Mrs. Barry the depth of his faith and trust in her, and yet there was that in his tone which told her he had been harshly tried, and that he longed for the support of her opinion.

"That is my conviction, too, Mr. Maynard," she said, "but the poor girl will not even admit that. There is some tie or obligation, but what I cannot imagine. It is all-powerful. She seems to have pledged her word to silence about him. I'm praying for the major's return, for then I shall have some one to advise us both. Oh! What did Miss Baird say, Bridget?"

And from the hall came the reply of the still invisible messenger. "Miss Baird thinks she would rather not try to eat anything just now. She is lying down, ma'am, but by and by she will, I feel sure. I'll just broil her some chicken, ma'am."

And then abruptly Bridget broke off, for a quick,

soldierly step was heard on the creaking boards without, and Bridget hastened through the hall before the clang of the door bell resounded. "That's one thing Bridget will not do," explained Mrs. Barry, with a quiet smile. "She insists that Mary must attend door. She'd walk the length of the backyards of the garrison to find her rather than 'tend door herself. There goes Mary."

It was the orderly, with the commanding officer's compliments, and he desired to see Lieutenant Maynard at once, and in sore disappointment Maynard had to rise and go. "Remember what I say, Mrs. Barry," he repeated as he again bowed over her extended hand. "I shan't rest until I find out the truth about this robbery business and clear her utterly. It can be done and it shall be done."

"I hope so," came the answer, with a sigh. "I hope so, yet everything seems so dark for her just now, and how *can* we get at the truth?"

No wonder she asked herself as Maynard limped away how it was possible a raw, inexperienced subaltern could discover anything when the police officials had done their best and failed. They had searched and ransacked every doubtful resort, every suspected house, shop or saloon in town, and not a vestige had been found of the stolen property, nor a trace of the perpetrators beyond the wagon

tracks, lost all too soon in the general rut of traffic in the busy frontier town.

It was but a short distance to the adjutant's office, and there Maynard found Captain Walters pacing impatiently the floor of the long room in the old headquarters building. He turned sharply as the young officer's halting step was heard, and spoke impetuously:

"Mr. Maynard, I'm told you have had some knowledge of this man they call Boston besides the affair in town the day you tumbled him off your horse."

Maynard on entering had instinctively assumed the position of a soldier, and stood there in the presence of the temporary post commander, erect, and holding his cane and forage-cap in his hand. The instant the captain began to speak, the faint color faded from Maynard's face. In a moment he was pale as death. Looking straight at his commander, he uttered not a word

"Why don't you answer?" snapped Walters, glancing irritably at the subaltern. "I've had enough worry over this matter to drive a man distracted. Either you have or you haven't. Now which is it?"

And still for another moment there was silence, and then Maynard spoke.

"I do not know, sir."

"You don't *know!* Why, that's rot, Mr. Maynard! You must know whether you have ever encountered that man before. Men of his strength and size are not easily mistaken."

Again a pause before the answer came: "And yet, captain, I cannot say. I am telling you just as I would have to answer before a court. The only time I ever saw his face was that day in town—the day he headed the gang that took our horses."

The commanding officer sharply turned and struck the bell on his table, and almost instantly a young lieutenant of infantry appeared at the room. It was Warner, the temporary adjutant of the post.

"Mr. Warner, bring Mr. Cook in here," said Walters sharply, "and you come too."

The lieutenant beckoned to some one who was evidently in readiness for the summons. A powerfully built, gray-eyed, impassive sort of man in a loose-fitting business suit appeared at the doorway and silently awaited the captain's words.

"I've called you in here, Mr. Cook, and you, Mr. Warner, to hear what explanation this officer can give of the matter that has been brought to my ears. You persist in saying, Mr. Maynard, that you never saw this fellow 'Boston' except that day in town?"

"I have never made that statement, captain," answered Maynard, flushing painfully now, for the position in which he was placed was awkward enough without any misrepresentation of his words. At a nod from the captain, Mr. Warner and the stranger had taken chairs, but Maynard, the invalid, was still kept standing attention. Warner was several years his senior, but the young fellow had "taken to him," as the army expression went, from the day Warner first called to see him as he lay fretting at the Stannards. Even now the latter could not resist the impulse that prompted him to look to Warner for strength and sympathy, and the brown eyes answered the mute appeal, and said, if ever eyes could speak, "Stand fast! I'm with you."

Walters slowly lowered himself into his chair, glaring the while impressively at the troubled face of the young soldier. It had again turned white.

"Why, Mr. Maynard, not three minutes ago you said right here you never saw him except that day in town——"

"Pardon me, captain. I said the only time I ever saw his face was that day in town."

"Then you admit having seen his form if not his face—admit having seen *him* all the same."

"No, sir, I do not even admit that. Once or twice I saw a form that resembled his very strongly. That's all I can say."

"Where was it?"

Another painful pause. Maynard was young and inexperienced; he did not know how far he might be justified in declining to answer a cross examination that must drag from him the whole truth that he had so religiously kept to himself rather than reveal what he had seen and heard and suffered, and thereby probably surround her dear name with renewed shame and suspicion. From the spirit and letter of the truth he could not deviate a hair's breadth. Neither on the night of that strange adventure in front of Barry's quarters, nor the miserable afternoon when he saw the huge bulk of this objectionable stranger bending over that slender form away down the row, had he seen a single feature of the stranger's face. Now it seemed as though the commanding officer was bent on dragging from him everything he knew, and vaguely he felt that this was not that officer's prerogative, and that so long as he held such sublime faith in Nathalie Baird's innocence of all complicity in or knowledge of the recent robbery, it was not only a right, but a duty, to refuse to reveal anything that might involve her in deeper trouble.

Whether right or wrong in this belief, Maynard had made up his mind. Captain Walters should find out nothing new at her expense if a stubborn stand on his part could prevent it. Of the meeting between her and the big stranger down by the end set of quarters, known as No. 1, everybody at the post, apparently, was informed. But so far as he knew, not a soul in the garrison but himself had any knowledge of his meeting with that burly and muscular prowler under Nathalie's window the night of the hop. All this flashed through his mind and determined his action before he finally answered:

"I saw a man of that general description one afternoon down by No. 1, but I was sitting on Major Stannard's piazza away at this end of the row."

"Yes, sir, we know all about that. A dozen people saw him talking with Miss Baird. And he resembled the man called 'Boston,' did he?"

"In figure and in general build, yes, sir."

"And now the other occasion, when, as reported to me, you met him face to face. How about that?"

Silence again for a moment, and again Maynard glanced at Warner for support, and again the deep brown eyes seemed to say: "Stand your ground."

"Captain Walters, I beg you not to press that question," said Maynard, respectfully but eagerly. "Colonel Atherton and my brother officers will be

home in a very few days. I will answer to him—to my colonel. But there are reasons why I ought not to speak further on this subject until I can consult him and Major Barry."

"You may just as well answer, Mr. Maynard," interrupted the post commander coldly. "Your refusal or hesitation is quite enough to stamp you as guilty of what I have been reluctantly forced to believe—of wilfully concealing most important evidence in connection with this most important case. I could not have believed it of you without the virtual admission on your part, notwithstanding all I had heard. This, sir, is Mr. Cook, of the Rocky Mountain detective force, from Denver, and he will tell you what you should long since have told me. Go ahead, Mr. Cook."

Painfully now Maynard was leaning on his cane. He half turned to face the detective. Cook seemed perturbed. He evidently liked the young fellow better than he did his job.

"It's just this," he said. "We know that fellow Boston very well down our way, and he has been in one scrape after another, and he was drunk one night in a saloon here in town, and some of the crowd were twitting him about the way you pitched him out of his saddle, and he answered that it didn't compare with the knock-out he'd given you right

here in the fort and right in front of officers' quarters the night of a hop. The barkeeper gave it all to us later—after they had scattered. It was the night he got out there at the Empire. He bragged that he was out here to meet a lady at the fort, and that you had interfered and got knocked down as a result."

Maynard's face was still and cold and white. Without flinching he gazed straight into the detective's eyes and made no reply.

"Well, sir," said Captain Walters impatiently. "Now, what have you to say?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You refuse to confirm or deny the statement?"

"I decline to say anything until my colonel comes."

Captain Walters flushed angrily, but kept his temper well.

"You still occupy a room at Major Stannard's, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Stannard asked that my sister and I should remain under her roof until the regiment returned."

"Very good, Mr. Maynard. You may now return to your room and consider yourself in close arrest."

Without a word, the young officer faced about and walked slowly and painfully home.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mrs. Turner forgot even that Mrs. Gregg and she were not on speaking terms that afternoon. She was calling at the Barrys' ostensibly to bless the inmates with her sympathy, but actually in the hope of seeing Nathalie and being able to tell how she looked and what she said. In this, however, she was disappointed, for Nathalie kept her room, and when Mrs. Turner would have gone aloft to visit her there, Mrs. Barry, far from assenting, declared she believed it best for Nathalie not to see any one until she had slept. But while the luxury of a personal interview with the suspected girl was denied her, and the hoped-for sensation was lost, Mrs. Turner was treated to one even greater and most unexpected.

Mrs. Stannard had hastily entered without either knocking or ringing, as had become her custom of late, and at sight of Mrs. Turner had as suddenly retired, closing the door behind her, and hastening back along the piazza. Only a half second's glance

had Mrs. Turner of her face, but she could swear that Mrs. Stannard had been crying.

Then Mrs. Turner was suddenly reminded that she had not seen Grace Maynard for at least two hours, and she lost no time in hastening in Mrs. Stannard's footsteps. Miss Maynard herself opened the Stannards' door and let her in, and Grace's face was the picture of woe and consternation.

"Something dreadful has happened, I feel sure of it," said Mrs. Turner, the moment she caught sight of her friend. "Oh, what is it?"

It was no time to think of recent differences. "My brother has been arrested," said Miss Maynard, in solemn tones, and knowing no distinction between that method of expression and the conventional form in use in the army.

"Who — why—I can't understand. You don't mean *he's* suspected of the robbery? Who arrested him? Where is he—gone?"

"He hasn't gone. He's here in his room," said Miss Maynard, with breaking voice. "It's Captain Walters who did it."

"Oh," said Mrs. Turner, disappointed in spite of her better nature, "been placed under arrest, you mean. Oh, that's so different, but what for—why?" and the eagerness in the fair lady's face and tone was unmistakable.

"He will not tell," answered Miss Maynard," and that is why I'm certain it is—on that girl's account. She has led him from one trouble into another. *Do* come in awhile. I'm so—so miserable I don't know what to do, and Ronald acts like a crazy man. He doesn't want even *me* in his room."

But Mrs. Turner's ministrations were all too brief and uncomforting. They consisted in a sharp and rapid fire of cross questions which evoked none of the looked-for information as to cause, or even as to the allegations, and Mrs. Turner lost her accustomed equipoise in finding she was losing time. Nothing more sensational had occurred at Russell for nearly two years, and the bliss of being the first to break the news to half a dozen households might be lost to her entirely if she did not act at once. She longed for Mrs. Stannard's reappearance, but her room door remained obstinately closed. When it became apparent that Miss Maynard really knew nothing about the matter, and that it was useless to question further, the energetic and now thoroughly aroused lady decided that she must go and go at once. So, despite her cherished friend's remonstrances, she bade her adieu, declaring she had faithfully promised to be at Mrs. Ray's twenty minutes ago, and so hastened to the door, only to be there confronted by a sight that made her pause.

Mr. Warner, the acting adjutant, accompanied by a stout party in gray business suit, had just entered the gate and met her face to face.

Warner politely raised his cap and smilingly asked if they could see Mrs. Stannard a moment. Mrs. Turner didn't know, but would inquire. So she returned and asked Miss Maynard, and Miss Maynard went into the dining-room and tapped at Mrs. Stannard's door. No answer. She peeped in. No one was there. An appeal to the servant resulted in the information that Mrs. Stannard had stepped out through the kitchen and gone around to Mrs. Barry's, thereby; as was at once apparent, dodging Mrs. Turner and her inevitable questionings—and a flush that extended beyond the customary limits was on that injured lady's face as she communicated to Mr. Warner the information that they would probably find Mrs. Stannard at Mrs. Barry's, next door. Should she go and call her? Warner said no, thanks, they had also to see Mr. Maynard, and they would go right up to his room; and go they did, leaving her and Miss Maynard gazing after them up the narrow stairway, and listening for the colloquy that would follow the knock at the young officer's door. They heard him say almost heartily, "Oh, come right in, Warner. I'm so glad you're here," and then, with certain coldness and hesit-

tion, "Why, certainly, if you say so. Come in, Mr. Cook." Then the door closed and the sound of voices became an inaudible murmur.

But Mrs. Turner forgot that engagement with Mrs. Ray for full ten minutes more, and then the visitors came clattering down, and Warner bowed most courteously to the lady as he passed the parlor door, and asked Mrs. Turner if she would be so very kind as to see if Mrs. Barry would receive him with a gentleman from Denver, for just five minutes. This Mrs. Barry proved not only willing but glad to do, but poor Mrs. Turner had to return to wonder with Miss Maynard full five minutes more what it all could possibly mean before she again bethought herself of lost opportunties, and so finally hastened away to spread the stirring tidings. It was force of habit that led her straight to Mrs. Gregg's and launched her, impetuous and unannounced, into that astonished and indignant presence.

The fine feminine scorn in the visage of her old-time friend and crony recalled Mrs. Turner to herself.

"Oh, I forgot," she exclaimed; "but now that I *am* here I might just as well ask you if you've heard the news," and even in her haste and perturbation Mrs. Turner showed the soul of the diplomatist. Had she simply burst out with the

announcement, Mrs. Gregg could then have crushingly asked, as she had on a former occasion, "And did you consider that an acceptable excuse for this intrusion?" Now wifely anxiety and womanly curiosity overmastered pride and resentment. She had to gasp, "No. What?" for her husband and the regiment were her first thoughts, and so having spoken, the veil was lifted, the ice was broken. She heard the announcement of Maynard's arrest and the presence of "such strange looking men, sheriff's officers, probably," without much emotion. She had meant to cut Mrs. Turner dead and never speak to her again, but now she was trapped. At least it opened the door for her to pitch in to her neighbor and give her the piece of her mind for which her soul had been longing for days, but Mrs. Turner sniffed the coming battle, and was up and away triumphant.

"I can't stop. I've got an engagement at Mrs. Ray's, but I was so excited by what has happened that I just had to drop in the first house I came to." Then away she went, and Mrs. Gregg had not so much as a chance for a crushing word. Verily Mrs. Turner was a tactician.

It was not long, of course, before the garrison had the news. The band came out to play; so did the children; while their mothers gathered on the

front piazzas and engaged in earnest talk, even while keeping an eye out for Warner and the stranger from Denver. They had remained at the Barrys nearly twenty minutes, and had gone again next door, presumably upstairs to Maynard's room. Then, leaving Mr. Cook there at Stannards', Warner had gone briskly over to the office. When he was finally seen returning, many fair faces, some of them sad and sweet, and full of painful interest, others eager with curiosity, were turned toward him, and had he been many another fellow, Warner might have had his head turned by such display of interest. He understood and correctly estimated it all, however. It wasn't the first time, poor fellow, he had had to visit an officer of the —th, and a regimental favorite, too, when in arrest, and now, though many of the number were women whom he could trust and to whom he would be glad to tell how blameless he considered Maynard, he feared that it would be difficult to discriminate where so many were evidently on the alert. He darted into Stannard's, therefore, and when he reappeared and walked gravely down the long line, his civilian friend slowly pacing at his side and listening with evident enjoyment to the music of the band, the young adjutant raised his cap as he passed group after group, but made no stop whatever. At the old east gate a

buggy was waiting, and into this he assisted Mr. Cook, saw him started back to Cheyenne, and then, to the scandal of many an expectant and impatient fair one, marched back across the open parade, entirely out of range, spoke a word to the band-leader to cover his otherwise unaccountable deviation from the path of rectitude and officers' row, then dove into his office and disappeared.

"Well, I never knew," said Mrs. Turner, "that Mr. Warner could be no mean."

It had been blowing fitfully during the early afternoon, but by five o'clock the wind was strong from the northwest, and instead of the customary lull at sundown, there came a steady gale. Women gathered their children to roost at an earlier hour than usual, and there was no frolicsome band chasing and shouting about the parade in the long spring twilight. There was less visiting to and fro, and only near neighbors dropped in to chat about the latest phase in the garrison sensation, and to wish it wouldn't blow so hard at Russell. Many would have liked to spend an hour at Mrs. Barry's, but were deterred from attempting it because it was early given out that she was much fatigued and depressed by the events of the last few days. Mrs. Stannard was with her, and Marion Ray and Mrs. Freeman for a time had been admitted. Others

called with polite inquiries for both the ladies, and Mary, the housemaid, had her answer pat. Mrs. Barry was not very well and begged to be excused, and Miss Baird was lying down. It was Bridget's evening out, for even on the far frontier did our domestic tyrants hold their employers to the weekly allowance of social freedom. It had been that cheery and good-natured goddess' practice to drive to town in a carry-all, owned by the old retired soldier hitherto mentioned, who ran a sort of 'bus line for the benefit, avowedly, of the men on pass, and the domestics on pleasure bent, but quite as much for that of his own plethoric old pocketbook. He was forbidden the road within the post because of certain contraband traffic in his past. But all that was necessary to secure his services was, as he announced, for the ladies and gentlemen of the post to leave their order at the band quarters, and sharp at seven he would begin the rounds of the back gates, and with a crowded vehicle go spinning away to town.

Mrs. Barry had imagined that Bridget would forego her visit on account of the gale, but Mrs. Barry was mistaken. In gala attire, her valued cook appeared to ask, as she always did, could she do anything for Mrs. Barry in town, and that lady thanked her, said no, but expressed some anxiety as to Bridget's going.

"Oh, we'll get there all right, mum," said she, briskly. "The wind's with us every inch of the way; but would Mrs. Barry mind very much if I stayed with friends in town and came out to-morrow if it blows harder? It's the coming back that'll try the old man's horses."

"Well, how can you get out in the morning?" was the question. "The stage doesn't come until nearly noon."

"Oh, I'll get my—I have friends who can bring me out, ma'am," was Bridget's confident answer. So the requisite permission was given and the cook departed in peace. When the carry-all came a few minutes later she was ready at the gate, a big satchel in her hand.

That night when "taps" was sounded few people heard it at all because of the gale. Nathalie had stolen downstairs, white and wan, and was kneeling by Mrs. Barry's couch, while Mrs. Stannard read aloud. Not a whisper had been permitted to reach the girl of Maynard's arrest. She knew of the visit of Warner and the man from Denver, and was told that they had come for an accurate description of the missing property, and so they had, despite the fact that Mr. Cook already knew almost all that could be told. He had not, however, called on Mrs. Gregg or Mrs. Freeman. He was greatly in-

terested in Mrs. Barry's case—in closely studying the window through which the professionals had entered the house, and in her description of the symptoms by which she had been assailed—the uncanny stupor and drowsiness that oppressed her so long. Mrs. Barry answered all questions fully, yet wondered at their tenor. He had even asked if he might look about the kitchen and servants' rooms, and Mrs. Barry assured him that their rooms had been searched by Captain Walters' order, and nothing been found. That so far from resenting it, Bridget was the first to urge that it might be done so that she and Mary could be cleared of all suspicion of complicity. They were both such faithful and devoted creatures. Mary had been with her for years and Bridget came with the best of recommendations from her former employers. Mr. Cook protested that his purpose was not to search for anything but traces of the burglars, yet he glanced more than once at Mary and looked about as though in search of Bridget, who had just stepped over to a neighbor's a moment, so Mary told her mistress. Then he went back and again closely examined the rear window of the dining-room, the one which the burglars had so thoughtlessly left open on their departure. The iron snap catch which held the lower sash down had been forced off and was found the

morning of the discovery of the robbery lying on the floor under the window. Mr. Cook had raised the sash, studying it within and without, all the time whistling softly and saying nothing, and his proceedings had affected Mary to the extent of having to declare to Mrs. Stannard at tea time, she was that nervous she didn't know how to stand.

And with Bridget now gone and the gale growing and no one to talk to after ten o'clock Mary had become more and more nervous. Mrs. Stannard found her sitting in the kitchen a little later, looking white and miserable, and asked her why she didn't go to bed, whereat the poor girl began to weep. She couldn't explain it, she said, but she felt all creepy and queer. She was afraid to stay alone. She was sure something was going to happen, and Mrs. Barry, always kind and sympathetic, bade the girl make a bed for herself on the couch. She would be glad to have her near her this night any way, in case she desired to communicate with Nathalie.

It must have been after eleven o'clock when Mrs. Barry succeeded in sending Nathalie to her room. By that time she was comfortably stowed away for the night in her own white bed. She had Mary close at hand and needed no further attention. Mrs. Stannard had been stationed at Russell long before,

and was well accustomed to the violence of the Wyoming gales, and to the rocking and creaking of the old wooden quarters, but it seemed to her as though the spite and fury of the wind had quickened at the sound of the ten o'clock bugle, and before leaving her friend for the night she took a look into the kitchen to see that all was safe and snug. The fire had been carefully banked over with ashes in the big cooking stove. The bracket lamp was extinguished, but the door leading into the girls' room swung uneasily on its hinges and banged against its frame, driven by the draught that would leak in through invisible chink or cranny. Setting her own hand lamp on the table, she firmly closed the door to prevent its further slamming, and then, leaving the kitchen in total darkness, except for a dull red glimmer through a crack in the stove, she returned to the front of the house, bade her friend an affectionate good-night, and buffeted by the storm, scurried along the front piazza and let herself in at her own door. A light was burning on the landing above, and Miss Maynard had evidently gone aloft, for the parlor lamps were turned low. Yes, her voice was audible. She was in her brother's room. Carefully, as she had done next door, Mrs. Stannard inspected her own kitchen, and finding everything safe there, called aloft to know if Mr. or Miss May-

nard needed anything, and then bade them a cheery good-night.

"Don't mind the wind. It is swinging round now and blowing from the northeast—a most unusual thing, and I can't help thinking it will stop before morning."

But she fancied from Miss Maynard's somewhat choky tone that she had been crying, and thinking over this and other matters, it was quite a while before Mrs. Stannard got fairly asleep.

Midnight had long gone by. Old Fritz and his ghostly team and carry-all had returned and been safely housed, and still one light, and only one, seemed to burn brightly along officers' row. It shone through the shade of the dormer window of the front room in the Stannards' half of the big double house assigned to the two majors, the room now occupied by Mr. Maynard. The sentry on No. 1 noted it as he called off at half-past twelve. The corporal of the guard noted it as he made his lonely round, for since the robbery old Walters had his guard patrol the post. But that light and those at the guardhouse were all the corporal could see until just about half-past one, when a woman's awful scream was borne upon the gale, and a sudden glare burst from the rear of the Barrys' quarters. A sheet of flame leaped from the annex, and tore

under the eaves, and lapped and lashed about the dormer window at the north, the snapping and crackling of glass and shingles instantly responding. Bang went the sentry's piece, as he yelled the alarm of fire. Rush went the corporal across the parade, reaching the roadway in time to meet Lieutenant Maynard staggering out through blinding smoke with Mrs. Barry in his arms, and then diving in again the instant he had laid her down, to be lost to view an entire minute, then to reappear, followed by a broad sheet of flame, scorched, blistered, blinded and half suffocated, to come stumbling into the narrow yard in front, and to fall headlong over the blanket-swathed burden he bore clasped to his breast.

CHAPTER XV.

THE wild excitement and dread of that blustering night lived long in the memory of every family at the post. But for the most unusual, though fortunate, change in the direction of the blast, all officers' row on the northeast front must have been swept away, as, on another well-remembered night, the quarters of the infantry—all of officers' row on the northwest side—had melted away in a flood of flame some years before. With the garrison gone there was no fire department, and even had there been one of metropolitan proportions, it could have accomplished next to nothing. The big tinder-box jointly occupied by Majors Barry and Stannard was swept away as though in the twinkling of an eye. In less than ten minutes of the alarm a broad sheet of fire swept across the roadway and far out upon the parade, licking up the fence like a row of matches and blistering the hopeful young cottonwoods, just budding along the bordering acequia, while in less than twenty only a mass of glowing embers lay glaring in the fiercely fanning gale, and

every vestige of the goods and chattels had gone to feed the flames. The marvel was that the inmates got out at all.

First to discover the fire was Mrs. Barry, aroused by dense and suffocating smoke, and a sound of snapping and crackling in the kitchen. She called Mary, who sprang from her couch, rushed to the kitchen door, and, with an awful shriek, recoiled before the instant rush of the flames into the dining-room. Maynard, still writing in his room, heard, flew down the stairs, stumbled over her on the front piazza, then bending low, broke through the dense smoke now pouring through the little hall, found Mrs. Barry feebly striving to reach the doorway, and bore her, half suffocated, into the open air. Then, facing flame now as well as deadening smoke, had dashed up the stairs and burst into Nathalie's blazing room. The girl had managed to reach the wardrobe and to throw about her the very wrap she wore the morning she answered Maloney's impudent summons, and then had fallen, helpless and half stifled, unable to open her door. Reckless of himself, Maynard dragged the blanket from the bed, wrapped it about the slender and beloved form, lifted her like a child in his strong arms, and, followed by the seething tongues of flame, singeing his hair, eyebrows and mustache,

and scorching the skin of his face and hands, and neck and ears, had gone bounding down the row of blazing balusters and out into the open air before he fell, blinded, burned and almost suffocated, but triumphant. The guard was there in two minutes, the bandsmen and "doughboys" soon came rushing from their quarters. Women and children poured, shrieking, from the houses nearest, while others, less alarmed, hurried from those farther down the row. Warner was at the spot as quick as the guard, and, under his cool-headed direction, the rescued ladies were carried or led to Mrs. Ray's, and then they sent to the hospital for a stretcher for poor Maynard, writhing in terrible pain, while his sister, swaying to and fro, from side to side, knelt with clasped hands, moaning and sobbing and imploring people to do something for him, deaf to his stern admonition of silence, and only ceasing when he sought to stagger to his feet and leave her. Over him, presently, bent Walters, shocked and sore distressed. To him soon came the little doctor, and through a lane of weeping women and children they bore him to the captain's quarters down the row—Walters would admit of nothing less—and there with soft cotton and sweet oil and soothing lotions, with tender hands and words of boundless praise and sympathy, they did their utmost to com-

fort and to soothe. When the fire, swept by the gale away from the rest of the row, had burned itself out and Walters could hasten to the bedside of the brave young fellow, he almost sobbed aloud when he strove to answer Maynard's half apologetic—

"Broke my arrest, sir—but couldn't help it."

Meantime, though suffering shock and partial suffocation, Mrs. Barry and Miss Baird were pronounced uninjured, and were being devotedly attended at Mrs. Ray's. Mary, the housemaid, was still in a semi-hysterical state and required more waiting on than all the other fire sufferers combined. Mrs. Stannard and Miss Maynard, aroused by her shrieks and Maynard's dash downstairs, had instantly donned their wrappers and slippers and made their way to the open air, where, forgetful of everything else, they had devoted themselves to their next-door neighbors. Mrs. Stannard's servants, sleeping in the annex beyond the point where the flames started in the Barrys' quarters, had escaped without trouble, saving most of their belongings. Mary, but for her utter collapse, might have done as well, for the smoke and flame blew through the house and away from the rear of the annex, but, as it was, every stitch she owned, other than what she had on, went up in smoke, and what

was presumably of much greater consequence, Bridget's finery was reduced to ashes, and, as a sympathizing sister cook remarked, "She not even there to see."

And then when the fire was all over and had fairly burned itself out, and the pale dawn came creeping into the eastern sky, Walters, Warner and the doctor were still poking about the ruins, wondering how on earth the thing could have started. There was not a suggestion of a clue. All was safe and snug when Mrs. Stannard visited the kitchen; all was dark and quiet, but for the wind, when the corporal made his rounds; all was dark and quiet, said old Fritz, when he drove by the back gate toward midnight. No, Miss O'Meara—which was garrison for Bridget—had not returned with him. "Mrs. Atherton's ladies," however, had done so, and so had two prominent instrumentalists—the bass drummer and piccolo of the band, who had escorted those domestics to a show in town; and this quartette backed Fritz in his statements. There wasn't a sign of fire, nor were any of his passengers smoking as they passed along back of the row.

But Warner kept up his investigations after his commander had gone and the day had come, and, despite the fact that many soldiers' feet had

trampled the ground, there, in the dust of the old roadway beyond the rear fence, he found overlying the well-known trail of Fritz's team and wagon, the unmistakable print of a horse's hoofs and a buggy's wheels. Even before arousing his weary captain with this important information, he had dispatched a mounted messenger to town with a note to Cook.

"Majors Stannard and Barry's quarters destroyed by fire about one thirty A. M." he wrote. "Inmates safe—everything else consumed. Bridget O'M. went to town at seven P. M. and is still absent, but a single buggy stopped at Barry's rear gate, and there turned and drove back. It must have been between twelve and one-thirty. Better come out, quick as possible."

And within the hour Cook was on his way.

Meanwhile the gale had worn itself out, as had the fire, and comparative calm settled down on the post. The little doctor looked well-nigh used up when he overhauled his few patients at the hospital at sick call, but he had still much to do and could not give up. Telegrams had been sent to Laramie notifying the two majors of the destruction of their quarters and the safety of the occupants, and in a marvelously short time their answer was received. The two battalion commanders were coming by the first stage, while Atherton and the regiment re-

turned by the usual easy marches. The majors should reach Russell with the morrow's sun. To Barry the loss was far heavier in books and bric-a-brac and furniture than to his brother campaigner. Stannard and his devoted wife had long made it their practice to live in the simplest way, and years in Arizona had taught them how comfortable they could be with very little in the line of household goods. What they had lost—Mrs. Stannard's gowns and laces being the only very valuable items—was fully covered by insurance, and Barry had taken similar precautions. But he was a lover of books and pictures and little objects of art gathered in their foreign travel, and no money could repay him the loss of such treasures. All this was fruit for the breakfast-table chat about the post, and of greater consequence, apparently, than the shock to Mrs. Barry, the almost desperately heroic rescue of Miss Baird, and the now painful plight of her rescuer. Nursed by his sister and an attendant from the hospital, Maynard lay under Walters' roof, bandaged, blinded, and suffering torment from the burns on his hands and head, yet thinking less of this than of the fact that his enforced confinement came at a time when every faculty he possessed should have been brought to bear; for Maynard believed he had found the clue to the burglary, and a means of

sweeping away the cloud that hung over the name of Nathalie Baird, and he begged the doctor and Warner to let him have a few words with Mr. Cook as soon as possible.

It was barely eight when that official drove into the garrison and joined Mr. Warner. It was not half an hour later when another buggy arrived and deposited Miss O'Meara and her big bag at the back gate opening on Mrs. Gregg's quarters, into the kitchen of which she instantly disappeared. The buggy, almost as quickly, began to turn about, but stentorian shouts from up the row assailed the driver's ears, and he reined in his horse and waited. The shouters were Warner and Mr. Cook, who issued from the rear gate opening on the still smoking ruins, and came running down to the much-surprised occupant of the "rig." Cook's face took on a shade of disappointment at sight of him.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Jimmy," he said, in almost aggrieved tone, for he recognized in the man an employee at the very stable at which he hired his own "outfit." "What brings you here so early?"

"Orders," said Jimmy briefly, he being a discharged soldier. "Boss told me to hitch up Billy and drive that lady out to the fort. She said there'd been a fire and she was afraid her property was destroyed."

"Well, how'd she know? The paper has no mention of it."

"I dunno. First I heard of it was what she told."

"Well, why didn't you drive on up to where the fire was, then?"

"She told me where to stop. Said she wanted to see some friends first thing. She settled with the boss for the rig, so I had nothing to say. Boss said to get back quick as I could. What was the fire?"

"Oh, a couple of houses—upper end of the row. But you just hold on where you are, or drive down and hitch at the store. I'll be responsible to the proprietor. I may want your buggy, and—Jimmy, no talk." In so saying Mr. Cook was impressive. Then he turned to Warner, who had stood a silent listener. "Where'd she go to?"

"Into Mrs. Gregg's, I fancy. This is Gregg's house in here. She'll want to see Mrs. Barry, I suppose, first thing."

But to this remark Mr. Cook merely replied by the double question, "Who's her friend in here and what time does that big stage go in?" He referred to an old red stagecoach that had somehow become the property of the United States "for which the quartermaster at Fort Russell was accountable," and

which, behind a spanking four-horse team, was driven in those days to town every morning with the mail and the market baskets and orders of the various households of the garrison. In addition it carried such enlisted men or domestics as might have permission to go to town in the morning.

"Don't know who her friend is—the cook, probably. As for the stage, that gets away about ten or half-past ten," said Warner. "Why?"

"Well, I want to know if Miss O'Meara attempts to go with it;" and Mr. Cook spoke as though the name of the lady was sweet to his tongue. "Now, let's go back to the shed."

The shed referred to was the rear portion of the annex, which, thanks partially to the efforts of the soldiers in one direction, but mainly to those of the wind in another, still stood, charred, blackened, but only partially consumed. The fire seemed to have broken out in the kitchen, possibly about the stove. The interior of this tinder-box was a mass of flame when Mary opened the dining-room door, and a way for the flames to flash in and lay hold of everything inflammable there. Already they seemed to have eaten their way through the roof to the eaves of the main building, and had attacked the projecting "dormer" of Nathalie's room. Then, driven by the fury of the gale, they had poured

through the house, destroying all before them, but leaving this melancholy wreck behind. Only the inner end of it, that which adjoined the kitchen, had been burned, but against that partition hung the wardrobes of the two domestics. Under the gowns and garments stood their boxes—Mary's, a modest, old-fashioned little trunk; Bridget's a brace of saratogas; and of these was left little beyond charred and water-soaked fragments.

And yet, so valuable did Mr. Cook consider these relics, that one of the first things he did was to ask that a sentry be posted there with orders to permit no one to disturb anything about what was left of the premises, and it was done forthwith.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Barry, kind soul, though very weary and distressed, had been informed by Mrs. Ray that Bridget was in the kitchen and begging to be allowed to see her mistress. And it wasn't to weep over her own losses that Bridget came, but to deplore the dreadful danger and shock to which "Mrs. Barry, mum, and Miss Baird, too, mum," had been subjected. All three ladies were greatly impressed with Miss O'Meara's expressions of sorrow and sympathy. "She never seemed to think of her own losses," said Mrs. Ray later.

"She was sure she had banked the fire and taken every precaution before starting for town," added Nathalie.

"She could go down on her knees to Mr. Maynard," smiled Mrs. Barry, "for the brave, big, splendid young man that he is, and wasn't it God's mercy he was there? And was he so awfully burned as they said in town?"

At this recital Nathalie smiled not at all. She listened with trembling hands and averted face. Then the news had got to town, said Mrs. Ray, after the faithful cook had been led away for a mouthful of breakfast in the kitchen. Why, surely, yes! Mrs. Ray forgot the telegraph office at the post; and the fact that the glare of the fire could have been seen from Cheyenne, and that the hose and truck companies from the great quartermaster's depot at Camp Carlin, halfway to the town, had started with their heavy apparatus, only to see the flames die away before they had made the first half-mile over the gale-swept prairie.

And then by ten o'clock the ladies of the post began flocking to the Rays' to inquire after Mrs. Barry, and of course Miss Baird could not be omitted then; and, after the first few clangs on the bell had made her patient start through nervousness, Mrs. Ray had posted a bulletin on the door. "Please do not ring. Mrs. Barry and Miss Baird are doing very well and trying to sleep." The little doctor was striving to get Maynard into a doze,

but with no result. Anodyne seemed to have no effect. He insisted upon seeing Cook immediately, or Warner at least, and at last they were sent for, came, Miss Maynard retired below stairs with jealous pangs gnawing at her heart, and there was a five-minute conference, from which Warner issued all of a sudden with visible excitement in his face, Cook following, imperturbable as usual, and both went directly back to the ruins; and there, reinforced by two oily-tongued associates from kitchens down the row, was Bridget vainly pleading with the sentry for permission to drag out what was left of one of her trunks, and she seemed desperately in earnest, so much so that not until Cook and Warner were actually at the spot did she discover their coming. Then she suddenly ceased and would have dropped away, but Cook most politely bade her remain.

"It's all right that this lady should be allowed to touch her own property, Mr. Warner," said he. "What I asked of the sentry was, that no one else should disturb her things. Pray don't attempt to pull that box out yourself, Mrs.—I mean Miss O'Meara. You'll ruin your fine gloves. Let some of the men, or let me. I'm used to rough work—even to dirty work sometimes."

He laid firm hold of the strap handle nearest him,

but carefully inspected the remains of the trunk to assure himself that the bottom and the iron bands were sound. But when he pulled, though ever so gently, the sides seemed ready to come away.

"It's no use, Miss O'Meara," he said. "What you should have done was to take all your valuables when you drove out last night. You had plenty of room in the buggy for the trays of both trunks in your laps and you only took the one. It's too bad."

The woman stood staring at him with dilated eyes. Her face turned sickly gray. The two with her gazed first at her, then in stupefaction at the detective.

"What does the man mane?" asked one of them, suddenly finding voice. "Sure you towld us you'd never come back last night, Bridget." It was Mrs. Gregg's Kate who spoke, the widow of an old trooper who had served and died in the regiment, and left her as a legacy to his captain's family. "Sure, Mr. Warner, the gentleman's joking?"

"Ask Miss O'Meara," said Mr. Cook blandly.

"Jokin'," she stammered. "It's lyin'—foul-mouthed lyin'. Sure I never came near the post till this blessed day."

"The gale blew away your memory, with some of your hair, Miss O'Meara," said Cook, blandly as

ever, producing from a coat pocket a coil of auburn tress, that oddly resembled those which tossed about her brow. "Let me refresh it by calling to mind a portion of your conversation with Michael after you found Mary wasn't in your room and you shrewdly guessed that she was sleeping on the couch in Mrs. Barry's. Therefore there was no reason why he shouldn't come and carry these things out for you. Oh, it was excellently planned, Bridget. If you had found Mary there you could still have lifted the tray out and put it in the kitchen. She was so sound a sleeper she would be sure to doze right off again as soon as she saw you were safely home. Then Michael could have come and carried it out and you could have crept into your bed; but, as she wasn't there, there was nothing to prevent your going back to Mike's and having a fine time with your friends the rest of the night. That's why you went out and had him come into the kitchen and gave him that refreshing swig from the bottle in the pantry. Even that didn't involve you, Bridget. But you shouldn't have trusted to the gale to drown everything you said. The greatest mistake you made, Bridget, was in saying to Mike, 'If I'd known this it's the two-horse rig we'd a fetched with us, Mike. It's them that drove the best load that ever rolled away from this post.'"

But there was no need to say more. Bridget O'Meara, with horror in her eyes, was staring into his face, gasping, clutching at her throat, and then blindly reaching for support. So stupefied were her friends that she might have fallen for lack of aid, but Cook and Warner seized each an arm and held her. When Jimmy drove back to town at ten-forty, informed he was no longer needed, he was surprised on overhauling the big red stage to see seated therein the lady he drove to the post at eight. She had a deputy sheriff on either side of her and massive bracelets on her wrists.

CHAPTER XVI.

Five days later all the —th were home again, and great was the rejoicing at Russell. Atherton had directed Stannard to move in and take possession of the best guest room under his roof. Barry had applied for a long leave of absence. Walters, with his little company, was relieved from duty at the post, and on its way back to Fort Steele, and the last thing Warner did before going was to help carry Maynard over to the other guest chamber under Atherton's roof, where the colonel declared the gallant young fellow should stay until perfectly restored. The arrest never appeared on paper, never became a matter of record, for Walters had suppressed all further mention of it within twenty-four hours of his ill-judged order. Miss O'Meara, languishing in the county jail, had been subjected to the process known as "the sweat-box," an interrogatory torture that is supposed to compel the suspected malefactor to unwittingly betray the secrets of the gang to which he may be attached, and Bridget had broken down under the pressure.

As a result of her revelation Cook had rushed for Kansas, and was heard of no more for several days, and meantime there wasn't a woman at Russell who did not rejoice in the fact that she, at least, had never for an instant believed that Miss Baird had anything to do with the persons guilty of the burglary. Some of the ladies repeatedly said as much, notably Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Raymond. Walters had also had to call, poor fellow, and tell Mrs. Barry and Miss Baird how unhappy he was over having ever believed that story of the latter's knowledge of the burglary, but in justice to himself he must say that not only did the sheriff admonish him that such was his duty, but there were even two ladies at the post who similarly advised him. Neither Mrs. Barry nor Miss Baird would ask the question, but Major Barry did, and demanded an answer, and then Walters named Mrs. Turner and Miss Maynard, both of whom, as it subsequently transpired, had been actuated only by the purest and best of motives and with no thought of malice. All they said was that they feared she was being terrorized by some scoundrel who had a hold on her, and all they hoped was to relieve her from such a horror. Of course, if she had dreamed the captain would ever quote *her* or take such steps as he *had* done, nothing, said Mrs. Turner, could ever have induced her to open her lips.

As for Miss Maynard, she was in a state bordering on nervous prostration, yet she would allow no one else to take her place at Ronald's side. She and she alone should nurse and care for him, and there were indeed several days in which his sufferings were such he was allowed to see no visitor. Then he began to mend, and Barry had come and bent over him, with a world of gratitude and affection in his speaking eyes, and Barry said that he expected to get away within the week, but that his wife declared that she would not go until she and Nathalie could see and thank him in person, and Grace Maynard had to listen to it all.

But two days later, the Barrys' drove to the station, all the officers and more than half the women accompanying them to the train and seeing them off with every manifestation of affection. The doctors had said that it was necessary for Mrs. Barry's health, that she should be taken away from Russell as soon as possible. It was interesting to watch the different women in their good-by to Miss Baird, without whom Mrs. Barry went nowhere now. Mrs. Freeman clung to her, kissed her on both cheeks, almost cried over her. So did Mrs. Ray. Mrs. Truscott, too, was demonstrative. Mrs. Stannard was the last to leave her, and the eyes of both were brimming as at last she had to hurry

from the car. All the other women, young and old, were gentle and sympathetic in manner to her. Miss Maynard, of course, was still at her brother's bedside. Mrs. Turner, who rarely missed an occasion of the kind, had a splitting headache this day of days, and therefore was unable to come at all. It was the Barrys' plan to go to the South for complete change and rest, both for Mrs. Barry and Nathalie, and then to spend July and August at the seashore. The insurance adjusters had come and gone; the fire losses were being settled. Fort Russell had found out to its entire satisfaction that the burglaries were fixed on a gang, of which Miss Baird could have had no knowledge whatever, despite the accepted fact that she had some suspicious acquaintance. One reason, indeed, that the Barrys hurried was her continued ill health. When Doctor Pease heard all that Mrs. Barry had to tell him on his return, and had felt Nathalie's pulse and looked into her sad eyes, he hummed and hawed and blinked, and made some inquiries of Mrs. Stannard, and finally told both Major and Mrs. Barry, that they could not too soon get the girl away from Russell. She was simply dying by inches there and needed immediate change. Most affectionate and grateful was the letter Mrs. Barry penned to the young officer, still lying half blind and more than half

bandaged up at the colonel's. Most grateful and timid and shy was the little note penned by Nathalie to the same recumbent warrior. She would always pray for his happiness and never forget the heroism to which she owed her life, but it took her hours to get that letter into semi-satisfactory shape, and who knows how fast and hard the tears fell as she wrote? They were entrusted — both the notes — to Mrs. Stannard's care, that she herself, said Mrs. Barry, might read them to him, and not Miss Maynard; for against that Spartan sister Mrs. Barry's heart was set. The proposed visit to Ronald's bedside had to be abandoned. Mrs. Barry could not well be carried up the stairs for a formal call, and Nathalie could not well go without her. "But remember," Mrs. Barry had written, "we shall be at Sea Girt for July and August; shall have our own cottage there, and you are to have two months' leave, and you're to spend every possible week of it with us."

Not until well on their way to Chicago—the first objective point, because both ladies had to renew their wardrobes—was Mrs. Barry informed that there might be difficulty as to that part of the plan. She was holding Nathalie's hand and saying how lovely it would be to have their brave, big boy there to be nursed and petted until all trace of his burns was swept away, and Nathalie falteringly said:

"But there is somebody else who is awaiting his coming and expecting to do all this;" whereat Mrs. Barry turned with prompt, even indignant, denial in her eyes and said:

"He never told you so."

"No, but his sister did. It—it is quite an old affair."

"What did his sister tell you? Who is it?"

"That he was in love with—engaged to—a Miss Gertrude Bonner, at their home."

"Nathalie, that woman has told another lie!" exclaimed Mrs. Barry; and the major, coming in from the smoking compartment at the moment, marveled at the sudden fire in the soft eyes of his beloved wife and at the flush of color in her usually pallid face. Only deep conviction and wrath as deep could prompt her to the use of language so forcible.

They were in Chicago an entire week, joined at once by Mrs. Atherton and piloted by that experienced and accomplished shopper, and then came a deluge of letters from Russell, and news, *such* news. Two men had been run down and arrested in Kansas City, had been brought back to Cheyenne and promptly recognized as the "toughs" engaged in the cutting affray at the Empire wherein "Boston" was placed on the invalid list; were also recognized

as the two who were seen at the Railroad House early on the morning following the robbery. Miss O'Meara's cousin, Michael Dungan, who kept a saloon frequented ordinarily by laborers and machine-shop men employed in the railway yards, had likewise been gathered in by the police, but only a little of the stolen property had been recovered. Cook and Maynard were dividing the honors of the capture. "Cook, of course," said the major at once, "but why Maynard?" And not until he came to Mrs. Stannard's letter was all explained. Cook had had certain undefined suspicions, but could do nothing—prove nothing until the brief interview with Maynard.

This was Maynard's part of it. He sat up late that blustering night writing long letters to his father explaining his conduct in refusing to betray Nathalie Baird, telling him of his deep love for her, his faith in her innocence, and all that had come of it. He hoped for his father's approval of his conduct, despite the stigma of arrest, and he begged him not to be prejudiced against the girl whom he so devotedly loved, by anything Grace might say. All *that* could be explained. He wrote to Atherton and to his captain, and by that time it was one o'clock, and he felt weary and hungry. He had eaten hardly a mouthful since his arrest and was

suffering the consequence. He had of late availed himself of Mrs. Stannard's repeated invitation to help himself, and had gone down to get a glass of milk or a crust of bread, and so, taking his candle, he softly descended the stairs, his slippered feet making no noise; let himself out into the draughty kitchen and attacked the refrigerator, setting his candle, meantime, well back upon the kitchen table. His appetite soon satisfied, he was about to retire, when through the thin board partition separating Mrs. Stannard's kitchen from Mrs. Barry's, he heard the sound of a key rasping in a rusty lock, and suddenly there came a rush of wind through every crack and knothole. His candle was instantly extinguished, and some one seemed almost blown into that neighboring room. He heard Bridget's voice, low and cautious, but objurgatory. He was groping for his candle, intending to retrace his steps, when a moment later that door was closed; the rush of the wind ceased, and Bridget struck a light, tiptoed to her bedroom, and almost instantly hastened back, reopened the door, called "Mike" in cautious tone, admitted some masculine stranger, and said, "What luck! She's sleeping wid the missus. We can load the things right in now, and I'll go back wid ye. Shure, they'll never dream I was here."

And then it all flashed over him. The disappearance of Bridget the day of his visit to the Barrys', the swinging *portière*, the apparent determination of the domestic in question to avoid his sight, the probable attempt on her part to lurk in hiding in Barry's den and listen to his plan or suspicions, if any plan he had. And now her coming in after one at night, with a strange man, and talking of loading the things right in and going back with him and no one dreaming of her being there. His heart hammered violently. Three hours before he had cudgeled his brains in vain for a clue to the robbery, and here it came, all at once, unlooked for, unbidden.

At first he thought stolen property was meant when she spoke of loading up the things, but then he remembered how thorough a search was made in that room, and it seemed improbable. He peered through a knothole and got a glimpse of the stranger's face, but it was one he had never seen before. She lugged the tray of a trunk to the kitchen table and loaded it with finery. She gave her friend a comforting dram from the bottle in the closet and did not disdain a sip on her own account. She rejoiced that they could go back together and finish the frolic of the night, as she said, just as Cook later confounded her by quoting—"If I'd

known this it's the two-horse rig we'd have fetched wid us, Mike. It's them that drew the best load that was ever rolled away from this post." She was for loading up another tray. She excitedly argued with Mike on the subject. The young lieutenant suspicioned somebody, she said. She'd heard him say so, and it wasn't Boston, bad scran to him, much as she wished they could make it so appear. She wished to get her valuables under Mike's roof before anything was discovered, in case she had to skip. But Mike said they had all they could possibly carry in that gale; to come along now and he'd take the next load when he brought her back in the morning. And so Mike lighted his cigar and hurled away the match, and the precious pair went forth into the night, leaving Maynard to plan what should be their reception on their return. The entire visit occupied not more than ten or fifteen minutes. By a quarter-past one Maynard was back in his room, trembling a bit with excitement and joy, and, reseating himself at his desk, he was making a memorandum of Bridget's words and the stranger's appearance, when startled by Mary's awful cry on the lower floor of the house adjoining.

Maynard's discoveries had been supplemented by those of Cook. The burglars had been admitted into the house, doubtless by Bridget, and by way of

the kitchen. The window was left open and the latch had been snapped off to give the other impression, but Cook's keen eyes had detected the fraud. No chisel, no implement had been inserted from without, for the cotton stuffing showed no signs of it whatever, as it infallibly would have done had the window been forced. Bridget had unquestionably brought about the heavy, stupor-like sleep of her mistress. When Mary came that evening for the glass of fresh spring water which Mrs. Barry always had at her bedside, as well as to renew the water in which her medicines were dissolved, Bridget, as she well remembered, had the pitcher ready. It was easy for the latter to have slipped in one of the glasses a tablet or two of colorless morphia. Its faintly bitter taste was neutralized by that of the medicine itself, but that could not destroy the effect. Indeed, among the unconsumed effects at the bottom of one of Bridget's saratogas, was found a little vial containing some half a dozen cube-like tablets which Dr. Pease promptly declared to be morphia.

Mrs. Stannard had still more to tell. Captain Gregg had gone to Kansas City to see some presumably stolen property that had been captured there by the police, and was believed to be part of the Fort Russell plunder, and from there he tele-

graphed that the first thing shown him was Mrs. Freeman's watch, injured. Mrs. Gregg's was found at another pawn-shop, but the rings, pins and other costly jimcracks were still missing. Dungan's place in town had been ransacked, but to no purpose. The silver had probably been broken up before this. Mr. Cook had come to talk with her major about the business. Cook believed those two close-mouthed parties whom he had arrested were members of some gang of professionals who had been compelled to leave their favorite fields of operation in the distant East, and were merely keeping their hand in here on the far frontier. Their only hold on Bridget was through her putative cousin, Mike, a bad character at best, though not a "cracksman." Her letters from good families in St. Louis, which she had so confidently exhibited to Mrs. Barry in response to the advertisement for a cook, proved to be forgeries, but also pointed to the probability of her being familiar with names, localities, etc., in that city. So that was where the police were now working. Meanwhile Bridget, Mike, and the silent pair brought back from the border land of Missouri, were languishing behind the bars. Further proof was needed.

But nothing yet had been seen or heard of "Boston." If they could find him, Mr. Cook said, they

stood a big chance of learning who the others were. They were doubtless wanted in more places than one, and a goodly reward might possibly be paid. Mrs. Barry did not show this part of the letter to Nathalie, nor did she read it. The girl shrank at any mention of the fellow, and yet had assured her friend that she had no idea whatever whither he had fled, or where he was now in hiding, and that was enough for Mrs. Barry.

But there was a part of the long, long letter Mrs. Barry did read, and her gentle eyes more than once glanced up from the page and sought the flushing face beside her.

"Mr. Maynard improves rapidly now and picks up every day. The doctors say his eyesight will be restored all right, and that he will soon be quite well again, but he was badly and painfully burned for all that, and has suffered as keenly as he has uncomplainingly. Miss Maynard is still on guard over him, and some people are inconsiderate enough to say that they think that the way she watches every word and motion of his callers, and strives to forestall his replies, is getting decidedly tiresome. They wish they didn't have to see Mr. Maynard through his sister. Colonel Atherton has been called to department headquarters for consultation, and will doubtless go thence to Chicago to join

Mrs. Atherton, so you will probably see him before you go South. Major Stannard is in command meanwhile, and, as we are now under the same roof, we see more of the Maynards than anybody else, and Luce (her major) says he believes Maynard would be all right in a few days if 'that old maid sister of his would only clear out and go home,' but Luce always has something hateful to say of old maids."

"She is always downstairs when the orderly comes with the letters. She always reads over the address of those for her brother, and only through her do his letters reach him. Luce snorts angrily and 'says things', more than I like to tell you. He thinks she would even assume control of her brother's correspondence, and that she doesn't at all like it now that he is permitted to read his own letters. This morning Mr. Maynard said to me: 'The doctor tells me that to-morrow I may use my hand a little, and the first thing I do will be to write Mrs. Barry to thank her and Miss Baird for the lovely letters they wrote me,' whereupon Miss Maynard instantly spoke up. 'Why, Ronald, I'd be only too glad to write for you any time,' but he as promptly said these were matters that he preferred not to delegate, and I could easily see that she was much nettled. So *you* will be getting letters in a day or two"

And they did. Mrs. Barry's was a short, painfully written, three-page missive, but it delighted her greatly, and she wished to read it at once to Nathalie, but the girl had vanished. "Gone to read her own letter in her own room," said Mrs. Barry, with a smile that spoke volumes of hope and sympathy and interest, and she would allow no disturbance of the supposed maiden meditation for full two hours. Then as Nathalie returned not, Mrs. Barry became anxious, and tapped at the communicating door.

They were to start for the South that very night. The trunks had been packed, and many preparations made in the morning, but much remained to be done, yet there sat Nathalie at her open window, gazing afar out over the dancing, sparkling waters of the lake, her eyes brimming with tears.

"Mayn't I know what he had to say to my Nathalie?" asked Mrs. Barry, her tones full of fond interest, her fragile white hand placed caressingly on the bonny head.

For answer the girl took the hand in both her own and buried her face upon it. It was some little time before she could trust herself to speak, but first she made her friend take an easy-chair, while she herself once more knelt in the old confiding way, buried her head in Mrs. Barry's lap, and then

placed in her hand the little letter with the well-known Cheyenne postmark.

"Am I to read it, Nathalie?" was the question.

"Yes."

Slowly Mrs. Barry opened the carefully written pages. Every word and line seemed eloquent of the pain and difficulty with which it was penned; but there was no halting, no stumbling, no hesitating in what he had to say. A more outspoken, manly, straightforward appeal Mrs. Barry had never read.

"My Dear Miss Baird: I thank you for all you say in your letter. It was a sad disappointment to me that I could not see you and dear Mrs. Barry before you left, but the doctor says I might not have been able to see even could you have come.

"Nor could I have said perhaps what I must say now—that I love you with all my heart and soul, and that I long to hear from you that I may hope very soon you will be my wife.

"Nathalie, in these precious lines you write me you speak of honor and gratitude, and tell me you will always pray for my happiness. I pray for more. I do not want your gratitude. I beg you in your answer to forget that night and never again to speak of me as the savior of your life. I prize your honor, but I crave your love. And as for happiness, you and you alone can give it. They tell me you go South within a very few days. Before you start may I not have the answer I hope for —pray for—long for?

"Devotedly yours,

"Ronald Maynard."

Twice did Mrs. Barry read this over, one hand straying as she did so over the beautiful bowed head. Then, laying the letter on the dressing table, she bent low over the little pink ear that peeped through the rippling strands of bright golden hair.

"And the answer, Nathalie?" she whispered. "I am sure there can be only one."

No reply.

"You *have* answered, haven't you? You know we go so soon."

"I had to—yes."

"And it was—yes? Nathalie, I'm so glad——"

"Mrs. Barry—Mrs. Barry!" was the reply, as the girl burst into a passion of tears. "How could it be yes? Have you forgotten her—his sweetheart?—his promised wife at home? Have you forgotten—my shame and misery? Have you forgotten—him? No!" she cried, springing to her feet, her arms uplifted, her head thrown wildly back. "No! With that horror hanging over me I am fit to be no man's wife, and my answer was *No!*" Then face forward she threw herself upon the bed, sobbing in utter desolation of spirit.

Two days later that answer was in his hands, and when, in bitter disappointment, stunned and sorrowing, he would have turned to Grace as though for explanation, she had left the house. She, too, had received a letter that filled her with dismay.

CHAPTER XVII.

Contrary to explanation, Ronald Maynard did not apply for leave of absence when once more fully able to move about. Miss Maynard had gone at last, a peremptory summons from her father being given as the cause, he needing her services and receiving benefit from them far more than did his son. Colonel and Mrs. Atherton were home from Chicago, and regimental work went briskly on. Four troops had been warned for duty in the Big Horn country and were packing for the start. Major and Mrs. Stannard were still the guests of the Athertons, but, insurance matters being settled, Mrs. Stannard was soon to depart for the East to replenish her wardrobe. Everybody in the —th, from colonel down to the children, was making very much of Maynard, or would have done so but for the profound sadness and melancholy that seemed to oppress him. He was able to ride every day. He went about his drills and duties, but he could not be coaxed to the hops and dances and concerts. His father was very ill, he said, and failing so fast that

he, Ronald, could take no part in garrison gayeties. He went to Dana, whose troop was to go to the field, and offered to exchange with him, but Dana loved field duty and would none of it. The Barrys, with Miss Baird, had journeyed down the Mississippi and over to Havana, and were now resting among the pines of Southern Alabama, and, except by Mrs. Gregg, the famous night of burglaries was rarely mentioned in the press of other topics of more recent interest, when one evening new impetus was given to the whole matter by the tidings that a famous thief catcher had come out from the East armed with requisitions for the silent pair of professionals in jail, whom he recognized, by the descriptions sent to the police of the big cities, as prominent members of a gang that despoiled a great metropolitan bank two years before. If discharged for lack of evidence in Wyoming, they would be instantly rearrested on this other charge.

But Bridget, said the great man, was not one of the original gang. She was a Western product, an exile from St. Louis, whither Dungan's trail had been followed back and his police record thoroughly examined. Mike and his cousin, however, proved game too small for a hunter of the New York man's caliber. They were merely the catspaws. The case was to come up for trial within the week, but with

the morrow's sun there was excitement in good earnest in the prairie city. With the ease of long habit the experts had sawed their selfish way out of jail, leaving Mike and Bridget to rage at their defection, and to bear alone the odium of their crime. To the wrath of the Eastern official and the stupefaction of the sheriff, the birds had flown, and left no trace behind.

But now Bridget began to give tongue, and a sharp one it proved to be. Hitherto some fear or favor had made her dumb as to the antecedents of the pair and the circumstances that drew them together. Now, it seems, that having considerable negotiable booty stored away, the two had pledged their knightly word to Bridget that they would defray all expenses of her defense and Mike's if they would but stoutly deny all previous knowledge of them, and this they had done, claiming to know them only as gentlemen who visited Mike's saloon and were most liberal with their money. Then, it transpired that one of them had paid Miss O'Meara flattering attentions—attentions that turned her head and brought her thrice in one week in town, decked in finery that had seen better days, and wearers, in St. Louis. To him, in answer to question, she told all she knew concerning the valuables of the garrison. The officers and men were all

away. Why should not the cracksmen turn an honest penny at their old craft instead of rusting here while the big cities were being searched for them? Bridget made a clean breast of it, now that she had found her own case hopeless; while the prime movers, the tempters, the only ones who had profited a penny's worth by the robberies, had got off scot free. "'Twas them that persuaded her, through false promises and flattery, to 'dope' both Mrs. Barry and Mary," to let them in at the kitchen door, and to profess utter ignorance of the crime. They were then to share alike after the sale of the booty, but all she and Mike had got as their share was the jail, with the penitentiary ahead.

Again did Cook and the sheriff eagerly ask the same question, "But how about Boston?" And this was something she could not answer, nor could Mike. All either could say was that, after the row at the Empire, Boston was brought in a hack to Mike's place, where he had been a frequent visitor for some little time previous, and Mike hid him away in the back room of a wing of his house, and there, too, under his roof, were temporarily secreted these same fellows who later were so silent about themselves, but so dangerous meantime to Boston, to Mike and to Bridget. 'Twas Mike got Maloney to go out to the fort for the young lady of whom Boston

bragged he could get money—for somebody had to come in and pay for his lodging and keep—and the poor girl had indeed come and had raised the money for him, and if Mike hadn't taken care of it for Boston the others would have got it, for Bridget heard them "abusing him fearful." The moment he was well enough to move, Boston had slipped away, and that was the last seen of him. But meantime the burglary had taken place, and then the fire, and Bridget's downfall was complete.

All this, of course, was duly carried to Atherton, who was an interested listener, and all this did Maynard learn direct from Cook, for the question of the identity of Boston and his relation to Nathalie Baird had become vital in Maynard's eyes. Through him in great measure had the girl he loved been cleared of all suspicion of complicity in or knowledge of the burglaries. Through him, God willing and helping, she should be shown to the men and women of that garrison, especially the women, and more especially Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Raymond, as one so pure and good and noble that no one of their number could ever again think ill of her, and to do this he must solve the problem of her strange relationship to that unprepossessing stranger.

For Nathalie's letter had well nigh made him desperate. It was brevity itself. It was almost

bitter in its hopelessness. "Even had you no ties of your own," she wrote, "I have been—and for all I know may still be—so bound that the cruelest suspicions have attached to me, and, though you are generous, magnanimous, and make no allusion to this, I know you know it, and I can be wife to no man."

What she meant by ties of his own, other than those that drew him to the father and sister at home, he did not understand. Never for a moment did he dream that Grace had gone so far as to make Nathalie believe that there was a love affair—an engagement with some girl whom he had known long before his meeting with her. What must be done was to find that man Boston if alive, or the proofs of it if he were dead, and on this matter he talked long and eagerly with Cook, who could give little encouragement.

"If Miss Baird has no idea what has become of him I'm sure I haven't," said the man from Denver, with cold-blooded, matter-of-fact and professional bluntness. "You dropped on to a mighty good piece of evidence by a streak of very good luck, Mr. Maynard. Perhaps your luck will hold out still longer. I hope it may."

All the same he thought it wouldn't, and was willing to bet; for Cook had his weaknesses as well

as other men. If *he* couldn't find Boston how would a stripling lieutenant be able to?

June came and with it a summons that Maynard could not but have expected, yet that grieved him sorely. "Come at once. Failing fast," were the brief words of his sister's dispatch, and Atherton kindly laid his hand upon the young officer's shoulder.

"I hate to think of this sorrow coming to you after all you've been through, Maynard," he said, "and I would say I hope you may find your father better, but that I fear more than I can hope. At least he has lived to know how worthily you have borne the name and how proud we all are of you."

Ah, if the father could but hear those words, thought poor Maynard, as the train swiftly bore him eastward, with what love and pride would he not welcome him now, his only boy.

But hours before the still swifter trains of the Eastern railways whirled him along past Erie's wave and the mirror-like reaches of the familiar old canal, the father's ears were deaf to all earthly music, and Grace was weeping over the wasted hand still clasped in hers. Together, side by side, as chief mourners, walked the brother and sister behind the flag-draped coffin when they neared the grave. Convulsively she clung to Ronald, sobbing

and unnerved, as the comrades of the Grand Army fired their volleys over the veteran's bier. Plaintively she hovered about him during the days he remained there, settling the affairs of his father's humble estate, and then he told her that personal business would compel him to leave for awhile, but she would have her aunt, and Gertrude— By the way, where was Gertrude? She had not been to the house, he had not seen her since the day of the funeral, and then only for a minute. Grace merely "didn't know." "She came much less frequently of late," and Ronald vaguely felt that it was better so, yet wondered at the cause.

And now at last the sister asked no question, interposed no objection to his going. Well she knew that the deep sorrow in his brave young face was there before their father's death, and that much of it was her doing. Well she knew that she had that to answer for which he never yet suspected. Well she knew that, should he learn that in her overweening sense of her duty in the case, she had blackened the good name of Nathalie Baird in her revelation to Captain Walters, her brother's love would go as had the old faith and trust. He was master now. What would he say when the whole truth came to light?

Two days later Maynard was at the store of a

Mr. Williams in a charming little New England village, and had sent in to the office, with his card, a letter of introduction from Major Barry. The face that greeted him was that of a man bowed with care and sorrow, but it lighted with frank kindliness as it glanced up from the letter, and with a cordial hand-clasp Williams bade him welcome.

An hour later, the day's work done, the bowed form of the broken country merchant and the erect, athletic figure of the young officer strolled away together in the twilight to a grove "where Nathalie used to walk," and here Maynard told his story. Before it was half finished his one auditor had covered his grave face with his hands, and, bowed almost double, was shedding silent tears.

"When first Nathalie came to Russell she was the picture of health and happiness," said Maynard. "One night, however, after she had been there about a month I saw a prowler under her window, a tall, heavily built stranger in civilian dress. He threw pebbles at the window and hoarsely called to her 'Nathalie.' She was frightened and fled. She had been leaning out of the window when he first appeared. I challenged and grabbed him, and he knocked me flat as though I were a boy. Only a day or two later, a man strongly resembling this was at the head of a gang of street loafers that took

the horses of a patrol of which I was in command, and dashed out on the street. We halted them and I hurled the ringleader, who had evidently been drinking, out of his saddle. He was stunned and carried into a doctor's office. No one knew him except as 'Boston,' and all agreed that he had been there in Cheyenne but a short time, and had gambled away what money he had. He was still senseless, and as the doctor opened his shirt a silk bag was lying on his breast, swung around his neck by a silken string. On it, in monogram, were worked two letters, as I could painly see, an H. and W. A few days later this same man waylaid Miss Baird away out on the prairie. She came home looking badly unnerved; yet that very night, late, stole out of the house and met him, and probably gave him money. Again they met, though she would no longer venture out on the prairie. He dared to come into the post after the garrison had taken the field. Again he demanded money and got it—all she had left. Mrs. Barry told me that Miss Baird had so confessed to her. All this had been seen by ladies, officers and soldiers, and people declared this rough-looking man to be her lover, and her good name suffered. Shortly afterward, early one morning, an Irish saloon employee came out to the post, shouting aloud that he had a letter for the young

lady at Major Barry's, and she came down to him, and a little later walked three miles to town where the writer of the letter was lying, wounded in some fight the night before, and he again demanded money of her, and she sent away out to the post for twenty-five dollars, and then they let her go. Her health had suffered seriously, as had her good name. The Barrys begged her to reveal the name and whereabouts of this stranger that they might put an end to his blackmailing, but she implored them to do nothing, ask for nothing. She had given her word not to betray him. But, Mr. Williams, she implored Mrs. Barry to send her home, here, because this was the one place that fellow dare not follow her. There can be but one explanation. He has committed here or hereabouts some crime. He is a fugitive from justice, and that brave, devoted girl, for old time's sake and the love she bears those who were good to her in by-gone days, is shielding him to this day to the detriment of her own peace, happiness and reputation. Mr. Williams, will you lift the burden from her life and tell me who this man is or was?"

"God forgive him! God pity him!" was the heart-broken answer. "It is my poor wife's favorite —Nathalie's own cousin—my handsome, reckless boy, Harry," and the poor father buried his face in

his arms as though, in his pain and misery, he longed to hide it from the world. It was some time before he could speak with sufficient self control, and then he told his story.

"Hal used to vow when he was a big, stalwart young fellow and she a shy little schoolgirl in sunbonnet and short dresses, that Nathalie and he were to be married some day. He was always fond of her, but he was wild as a hawk and invariably in some kind of trouble. He went to Boston to work, and—I can't tell you the whole story—drink, gambling, appeals to me for money—more drink, more gambling, more appeals for money, more trouble through pool buying, and God knows what all. Then one night he came back here unexpectedly, hunted and fearsome. He had some talk with Nathalie, for she came in crying. Next day he was gone. Then came the detectives. He had forged my name and his employer's, too. He was caught, tried, sentenced to prison, and after a year escaped. That was the last of him until now. Long ago we used to say Nathalie was the only one who could ever influence him, and long ago she promised his poor mother ever to be a friend to him, and now, even to her, my son has been a curse, and through thick and thin she has striven to protect him. My God, but it's hard—it's hard!"

So Maynard was right in his theory, after all. All the homeward way he pondered over what he had learned, striving to settle on the plan by which, without bringing further misery to the stricken father, Nathalie's name might be cleared at Russell—her real relation to this outcast and scapegrace established. If it were only possible to trace the fellow, and bring him to book. There would be comfort in that, he thought, for his heart was hot against the scoundrel who could bring such shame to the loving ones at home, such shame and torment and peril to an innocent and almost defenseless girl. Of his own will, the father had given Maynard a written statement of the case to place in Barry's hands, and already Maynard had despatched it to him, while taking a copy to be used with Atherton at Russell.

Once more he alighted at the familiar old station and made his way to the cottage that was now Grace's home. All the brother's share in his father's little estate he had deeded to her. It was after sunset, and the soft hush of twilight had fallen on the beautiful valley. Even the drowsy hum of insects had died away, and only by the mellow tolling of the distant church bell, and the soothing plash of the river, sweeping over its rocky bed, was the silence broken. The townsfolk seemed mainly

gathered at the depot across the rapid stream, for the broad, shaded streets, soft and dusty, lay unwheeled, untrodden before him. Over on the playground a knot of children had gathered in absorbed attention about some elder, for the glad young voices were hushed. The long, shady walk before him was deserted. The silver shield of the growing moon was already gleaming high aloft. The stars began to twinkle in the eastward heaven. The low rumble of some far-away freight train was borne for a moment on the breathless air, then all again was peace and silence. Wrapped in thought, Maynard walked slowly toward the outskirts of the village, seeing no one whom he knew since crossing the old bridge at the Mohawk; turned mechanically to the west as he reached a cross street as deeply shaded as that by which he came, and there something sprang up in his heart that gave him a sudden feeling of hesitation, if not embarrassment. This was the street on which stood Gertrude Bonner's home. Bowered among rose and lilac bushes, and pretty trees, it lay only a few rods beyond that little rise in front of him. That light, twinkling even now through the foliage, must be in an upper window close under the rooftree. For an instant he wished he had taken the other side of the street, then scorned the thought as utterly unworthy. Why should he shrink from meeting her?

Briskly now he strode on, his head erect. If, as often in the old furlough and graduation leave days, she should be at the gate, or, seated on the piazza, watching for his coming, he would greet her cordially, kindly as ever. He reached the crest of the little rise. He could now see the dim reach of the path down along the westward slope, bordered by shade trees and shrubbery, and there, right at the gate, still some hundred feet away, yet distinctly visible—there was the same pretty, slender form he remembered so well, clad in its simple white gown. Doubtless there would be the same little knot of ribbon at the throat, the same bright color in the rounded cheeks, the same joyous smile about the rosy lips and shining eyes, the same frank welcome of the plump little hand. He had wired Grace of his coming, so, just as of old, here was Gertrude on the lookout. Yet, although his quick, elastic footsteps brought him every instant nearer, and by this time should be audible, she did not stir, she did not look toward him. She was not on watch for him at all, for her head was drooping, her eyes downcast, her back was toward him, and all her thoughts were riveted on—another man.

Yes, there at the gate on which as children they had swung together, Ronald and Gertrude; there, talking in low, rapturous tones was a youth, whom

Maynard had never seen before, yet recognized at once as the new young man, who in March had come to teach the village school, to whose humble salary he had already pledged himself to subscribe, and that the master had been teaching to good effect, and something far more sweet and thrilling than grammar and rhetoric was apparent at a glance. A black coat sleeve slid about the slender white waist, when Maynard was not ten yards away, and then, all blushes and confusion, the pair started at his cheery salutation.

"Why, Gertrude, I'm just in time to tender congratulations—which I do with all my heart, Mr. Crowe," said he, cordially extending his hand.

It was taken somewhat gingerly. The happy man could not at once frame his reply. Gertrude rose to the occasion.

"Well, we've been wondering when you would—condescend, Ronald, and I——"

"Condescend, Gertie? Why, this is the first I knew of it."

"It is? Why, I wrote to Grace weeks ago, while she was with you, and told her to tell you first thing."

And Grace had got that letter, for he saw the envelope and knew the superscription, and remembered how suddenly and precipitately she had left the

room. Grace had got that letter and never yet had told him. What could have been her object? Why should she have been silent? She knew his whole heart was wrapped up in Nathalie Baird, and that, except in a kind and friendly way, Gertrude was nothing to him. Why should she have concealed this?

And then, all on a sudden, Nathalie's words flashed across his memory.

"Even had you no ties of your own."

His steps were slower, his face sadder now by far, but from no chagrin at thought of how readily the sweetheart of his schoolboy days had listened to the first pleadings of another love. It was not that he had lost her. It was that the old, fond faith in the sister he had so long loved and almost as long revered and served, was shattered once and for all. And she who stood to welcome him once more to the little home that had been his, saw it ere he spoke a single word.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Once more was the old post of Fort Russell left to the care of an infantry guard. Once more were the troopers all afield and rejoicing in the vigorous, open-air life they led among the billowing foothills, the beautiful, sheltered valleys and the sparkling streams of the Big Horn. A summer camp had been established, and with this as the rendezvous and rallying point, Atherton was keeping his stalwart horsemen scouting far and near, from the Platte at Fetterman to the Yellowstone away to the north. But Indians were seldom to be found. Sitting Bull and his starving followers were beyond the British line, closely watched by the frontier police. Crazy Horse was dead, bayoneted in wild effort to escape from his guard. Gall, Rain-in-the-Face, and other notables of the Sioux nation, had fed fat their ancient grudge against the white soldier when Custer's hapless column withered away before the fierce blaze of their encircling fire. It was a holiday summer for the —th, a veritable picnic in the heart of the glorious country over which for

two years previous they rode only with strong battalions, with scouts thrown out in front, in rear, on every side, looking any instant for attack in force. Some of the ladies had actually broken up housekeeping at the fort and gone those rough hundreds of miles in army ambulances to join their lords in the tented field, and life at Russell was inane and stupid.

But when the Indians drew away and sought the shelter of the agencies, the "hustler" and the horse-thief began to infest the land. One night a dozen of Gregg's best horses—all of Sergeant Donnelly's patrol—were spirited away from the bivouac at the headwaters of the Mini Pusa, and driven, as the trail showed, away toward the Sweetwater, and there it was all split up and lost among the breaks and ranges of the cattle kings toward Rawlins and Rock Springs. Gregg boiled over with wrath when three days later, nearly worn out, his little squad of troopers reached the main camp afoot. Ray's troop was ordered out at once and bidden to raid the country far and wide until he found out where those horses were gone, and Atherton chose Ray because stockmen, cattle men, scouts and Indians all knew him, and malefactors feared him, and with Ray's troop went Maynard, detached at his own earnest request, and allowed to fill a temporary vacancy.

"It will do you good, Maynard," said the colonel kindly, "and give you some valuable experience. Yes. I'm glad to have you go."

It was mid-July. The summer heat was fierce, and the scorching wind blew pitilessly over the desolate sagebrush deserts beyond the Devil's Gate, and Ray and his fifty loyal blue jackets had ridden long marches from the time they left the cool shades of the Piney and the Clear Fork. But little cared they, those Arizona-seasoned soldiers, for blistering suns or stifling alkali dust. They were bent on the recovery of those horses, no matter though the thieves had three days and nearly a hundred miles the start. They had marched through the Sweetwater valley the previous year, and had seen many a hard-looking character who longingly eyed their clean-limbed bays. No man yet had ever ventured to "lift" a horse from Billy Ray's picket, and it tickled the vanity of his troopers that they and not Gregg's should be sent to recover Gregg's horses. The trail, though nearly five days old when found, was still distinct, and Maynard was getting many an hour of valuable lessons, for Ray had taken more than a liking to the quiet, sad-faced young fellow, and had no difficulty at all in deeply interesting him in the work. Everybody in the regiment seemed to know by this time that he

had returned to them wearing the willow for Nathalie Baird. There had been some days of woeful, wordy battling at Russell, for the feud between Mrs. Gregg and Mrs. Turner had involved others besides their lords, and Atherton was glad of the order that sent his whole command into the mountains and foothills, and far away from the snarls and tangles that seemed to have taken root at the fort. Turner's grim, sad, sallow face grew longer than ever, and even more than ever did he seem to withdraw from the society of his fellows. He, too, was thankful to get away from the post and into the field. Up to the time the last of the regiment marched from Russell, no trace had been found of the runaway burglars, but their duped accomplices, Michael and Bridget, had had their trial, been found guilty of complicity at least, and were "doing time" at Laramie. All doubt as to how the fire started was at an end. The generally accepted theory was that when Mike threw away the match with which he lighted his cigar, it dropped, still glowing, in the dust close to the basket in which Bridget kept her kindling; the fierce draught through cracks and crevices fanned its feeble glow into a blaze as the precious pair left the premises; the blaze had reached the tinder; the basket of chips was soon afire; the flames leaped to the table, the dry, rough-

boarded partition, and then the bracket lamp of brittle glass, filled with forbidden kerosene; and that, bursting, deluged the woodwork with liquid fire. This was the explanation accepted by the duly organized board of survey. Everything connected with the excitement of the springtide, therefore, had been practically settled, except the perennial squabbles in which Mrs. Turner was a factor, and the question of Nathalie Baird's relationship to the lamented "Boston," who had disappeared as though from the face of the earth.

They were talking of that very fellow, were Ray and Maynard, the day they forded the Sweetwater and struck out for the southward hills. Maynard couldn't understand, he said, how men dared run off with cavalry horses, because the U. S. brand on the shoulder would stamp them at once as stolen property.

"Why, bless your heart, Maynard," said Ray, "that's no bar. Stealing Government property is no crime in Wyoming, or anywhere else on the frontier. Besides, all they've got to do is to touch up that brand a little, and the U S becomes O 8, or a toadstool, or some other equally transparent device. But no jury ever convicts a citizen of stealing from Uncle Sam, out in these parts at least. Why, it's a feather in the cap of those fellows to run off our

stock, and the gang that did this trick were no novices, nor were they few in number."

And that night proved the truth of Ray's conjecture.

Just before sunset, away in among the jagged hills and ravines that hem the Sweetwater valley on the south, the dust-begrimed troop halted and dismounted, while Ray held brief converse with the owners of a little "shack," one of whom the captain knew. He had served his time in the old regiment, and, in common with all the other "old hands," would do almost anything for Ray; but now his tongue was tied. Oh, he had seen nothing, heard nothing. No horse thieves had been thereabouts. His partner was sure of all these points also, and even if they had seen or heard, it would be signing their own death warrants to tell. No, neither man could give any information.

But Ray's dark eyes never left the ex-soldier's face. He read a secret there, and was watching his opportunity. It came quickly, and while the partner was taking a long, long pull at Ray's proffered flask.

"There's a camp of 'em right in on the Rawlins trail, somewhere about five miles ahead. Seven or eight men and about a dozen horses—some of yours,

sure," whispered the veteran, and the captain nodded expressively.

At nine o'clock, despite the long day's march, Ray's men swung readily into saddle again, and away they went, every trooper guessing that the quarry was somewhere among those heights to the south, and wondering were they like their old-time foemen, the Indians—die-hards to a man. The moon came floating into the starry sky from behind the screen of old Laramie peak, and the wooded range that tumbled across the eastward horizon. The night wind went whispering over the hills and sifting the dust-cloud that hovered above the column over the stunted sagebrush, and the jack-rabbits trembled and shuddered in their burrows at the dull, muffled tread of those two hundred hoofs. Two miles away from the "shack" the trail grew steep and tortuous, and Ray bade Maynard follow slowly with the command, while he, with a chosen sergeant, pushed ahead in the dim, fairy light, and was speedily lost to view.

Another mile was passed without event. They were riding up beside and along the bed of a stream that the melting snows of the spring would send tumbling in muddy torrent to the valley, but now the channel was dry as the bordering bluffs. Not a sound had been heard from the advance, yet May-

nard knew they must be nearing the alleged camp, and he wondered how his captain would settle matters with its desperado occupants. Silent as so many specters, his men came filing along in his tracks. There were no scabbards to rattle, no jingling bit and chain, no clank of carbine against canteen. Long years of Indian scouting had taught these veterans what to carry and how to carry it, so as to give least warning of their movements. Only the muffled thud of horse hoofs told occasionally of the onward passage of a force of cavalry. At steady walk they pressed along until Maynard's watch said it was a quarter-past ten, and they had traversed nearly five miles, and then a shadowy form, horse and man, loomed up under the shoulder of bluff in front, and a warning hand was raised.

"We're onto them, sir," whispered Sergeant Burke, as Maynard reined up beside him and signaled to the column to halt. "They're having a regular jamboree right ahead about four hundred yards. The captain says to come forward slowly, and still as possible."

The word was whispered down the dusty column. Again the weary horses started and the noiseless march began. Presently there came from the distant front "a sound of revelry by night" indeed, at which the sergeant grinned sympathetically. Some-

where ahead there was a jovial gathering, a flickering light, as though from a campfire, a bacchanalian chorus, punctuated by occasional yells, and when the foremost troopers reached and peered around an elbow in the winding ravine, they saw a sight that made their mouths water. Singing, smoking, rollicking about a blazing fire, filling their cups at a little keg, and tossing their contents, undiluted, down their seasoned gullets, a full score of stalwart fellows were having a carouse such as many of Ray's devoted followers would have given a month's pay to join for even a minute. Two white-topped wagons were halted in a little glade; mules and horses were tethered all around, and so absorbed was the entire camp in its merriment that even the dogs had not yet sniffed the coming foe.

"Box Elder Spring," whispered Sergeant Burke to the young lieutenant, "and they must have rendezvoused here from all over West Wyoming."

And then, riding cautiously to them, an amused grin on his handsome face, his white teeth gleaming in the moonlight, came Captain Ray.

"Maynard, old boy, we're in big luck. If all the horsethieves from Laramie to Lander, from Rawlins to Rawhide Butte, ain't right here in caucus assembled, may I never straddle a Kentucky-bred horse again as long as I live. Gregg's quadrupeds

are all on t'other side of camp. We'll corral them first, then you and I'll pay these gentlemen a social call. We can't *do* anything to them, you know, because military interference isn't tolerated in the territories except in case of Indians. Like as not we'd stir up some sheriff among these fellows and he'd spring the law on us. We're no *posse comitatus*, but yonder's our horses all the same. Just dismount, you men, till the moon gets behind that cloud," he continued; at which the foremost troopers noiselessly slipped out of saddle, and all the long column followed suit.

Ten minutes later, as noiselessly and circling well away from the boisterous camp, the troop stole away from the shadowy cañon and, favored by the darkening clouds, rode easily around to the southern side. Here a dozen men dismounted and, following Ray and Maynard, crept softly forward, and, speaking in low, reassuring tones to the nearest horses of the little herd, went swiftly from one to the other. Each one recognized as a government "mount," was quickly secured by a lariat loosely knotted about the neck, and the transfer of what the captain called the "stawk" back to the care of their old masters was well nigh complete when out peeped the moon again. A mule set up an unearthly bray, a dog barked furiously, and some straggler from

the band of revelers gave one wild yell of warning, instantly followed by a cry, "Cavalry, by God! Look out, fellers!"

There was a rush for the horses, a volley of oaths and execrations, a scramble for saddles, and a show of six-shooters, but above all the uproar one voice, furious and merciless, rose dominant.

"Curse your traitor hide! This is your doing, Boston." Then followed a shot, a shriek for help, another shot, and then, pistol in hand, Ray dashed forward into the thick of the throng.

"Stop this!" he commanded. "Stop, or by God, we'll take a hand. Bring up the troop, Maynard. Grab that lunatic, some of you."

But with a spring like a cat the "lunatic," his pistol still smoking, threw himself astride a wiry cow pony, and dashed away into the darkness. Some of his gang ran for their horses and followed suit. Others, stupefied, stood gazing up at Ray. Others still were bending over a groaning, prostrate form. The firelight fell on the pallid, distorted face, and Maynard knew it at a glance. Here at last was Nathalie's tormentor. Here, shot to death, lay "Boston."

A word from Ray had sent a dozen troopers in pursuit of the murderer. Another word, and those who remained, stunned and half sobered, were sur-

rounded and held by another squad of blue-shirted troopers. Rough, yet tender hands bore the sinking man closer to the fire and gave him stimulant. He gazed miserably up one moment, searching their faces as though in hope of some word of encouragement, and his eyes met Maynard's. He knew him instantly, and his face, beading now with the sweat of agony, took on an imploring look. He strove to speak, and one of his fellows turned and said:

"He want's to say something to you gentlemen."

Then, dismounting, Ray and Maynard knelt beside the dying man.

"They've killed me," he almost sobbed. "They knifed me at Cheyenne, months ago, because I swore I'd have no part in that robbery. I've been a curse to all of my people, but I wasn't that mean. I was mean enough though to borrow—every cent—that poor girl had—at Russell. She was my cousin. She did all she could to save me—to make a man of me— She even borrowed money—to lend to me, but I've saved over a hundred—I'd have paid it all if God had—let me live. It's—all in that silk bag —round my neck. Lieutenant, you're a square man —I'm sorry I ever—hurt you, but I *had* to, or get caught—under her window. I wouldn't bring harm

to her—for the world. Shake hands on it, lieutenant, and promise me you'll give it to her—that money— It's—all I've got. Shake."

And with his twitching hand in the firm grasp of the young soldier, Boston died.

Another week, and with their recaptured horses Ray and Maynard were again on duty with the regiment and under orders for home, but before the move began there came tidings that involved a change in the personnel of the old regiment, and one it could not welcome. Barry received his promotion to a lieutenant-colonelcy, and a new number gleamed in silver over the crossed sabers of his forage-cap. It was hard to lose this true-hearted, courteous soldier and gentleman from the —th. It was hard to think that Mrs. Barry would not again return to them, for, one and all, men and women both, they knew her influence for good, and deplored their loss. There were quite a number, therefore, who received the further news that came with something akin to gratification: the other regiment would not get the Barrys after all, for Mrs. Barry's health would not admit of her going to the extreme north, and knowing this, and needing a new inspector-general just then, a distinguished division commander asked that the recently promoted lieutenant-colonel be assigned

to him for staff duty, and the war secretary was pleased to say "Aye." The summer at Sea Girt had been of benefit to both Mrs. Barry and Nathalie, especially the latter, who was beginning to look wondrously well again, wrote Mrs. Barry, and shyly, sweetly happy. "You must come and see for yourself, Mr. Ronald Maynard," she wrote, and that was something the bronzed and wiry warrior meant to do the moment the summer's work was done, and he could get the longed-for leave of absence.

Very sad and touching, but grateful, were the letters that came to him from the sorrowing household--Henry Williams' kindred, in the placid New England village; yet even those letters breathed something like relief from a long-threatened shame. It was as though the final taking off of that reckless, sin-stained wanderer had lifted from their hearts a load of anxiety and dread.

Then there were Grace's letters, so changed from all the old possessive, advisory, not to say mandatory, missives that used to come to him. Grace felt her fall from grace far more keenly than her stubborn pride would ever let her show. Grace maintained, to herself at least, that her course was justified by the circumstances, and would ultimately have been justified in Ronald's eyes, but for

Gertrude's utterly unlooked for and incomprehensible defection. Had she but remained faithful to her schoolgirl fondness for Ronald, he would have been in honor bound, and, over the resultant dovecote would Grace have hovered, its self-appointed, self-sufficient guardian angel. But with Gertrude the first to bolt there was an end to any semblance of obligation on Ronald's part.

She had faced him unflinchingly when at last brought to bay and told that she had concealed from him the fact of Gertrude's engagement. She admitted it and declared that it was her wrath at Gertrude that prompted it. She felt that, purely out of pique because of Ronald's indifference, the girl had temporarily taken up with another admirer, but that it was nothing more than a fancy from which Grace could wean her when one again she resumed her sway at home. But Grace had been away too long. The young man had come to stay, and another of her former vassals had declared independence.

And so, with both her former subjects in revolt, Grace's home life seemed grown even narrower, sadder than ever. With her loved father gone, she had little to do but brood over the past and bewail the present. People, good, church-going neighbors, began to speak of her as embittered and morbid,

and to upbraid her, in all kindliness of spirit, because she became lax in attendance at prayer meetings and the like, and all the time the poor woman was asking herself what would Ronald say if he ever learned that she had actually joined forces with that empty-headed, frivolous creature at Fort Russell in war against the good name of Nathalie Baird. Anger blazed in his eyes when he wrung from her the admission that she had told Nathalie Baird that he was virtually engaged to Gertrude Bonner, but it was anger too deep for words. He would have no scene under the roof that so long and until so recent ly had sheltered his father's patient spirit, but he turned from her in a silence that told her far more than any outburst of reproaches how utterly in his estimation she had fallen.

He never even wrote to her the particulars of Williams' death. He bundled a newspaper into a wrapper, and sent it without comment of any kind, and she read it, little caring what confession he had made to Ray and Maynard. She heard Gertrude's clear young voice carroling like the lark in the joy of her love, day after day, and the contrast of her own gloom and desolation weighed more and more heavily upon her. As the summer waned and the boughs of the fruit trees began to droop with the weight of their ripening load, she retired more and

more from public view, rarely appearing as of old on the village street, or speaking masterfully at the church societies. She was aging fast and growing ill, and at last it was her aunt who wrote and bade Ronald not to be slow in coming to them.

He showed the letter to Atherton, with an awed look in his grave young face. Sister Grace had ever seemed so strong, so far removed from human ills or frailties, but there could be no mistaking the nature of the summons.

"Better take a small escort and ride for Rock Springs, Maynard; wiring from Fetterman for your leave," said the colonel, and Maynard did so. In ten days he was home, shocked to see how aged and ill his sister looked, and feeling now a sense of keen sorrow and remorse that he had shown such deep offense at her errors. After all, had she not devoted years and years to him? had she not been a loving and faithful sister? He knelt by her with sorrowing heart and shining eyes, yet when he would have told her of his regret, she checked him.

"Ronald," she whispered, "I want to see *her*. I have a reason. I want her forgiveness."

"For what, Grace?"

"For something I want you never to know until time and Nathalie have taught you to forgive me anything."

Late one lovely October afternoon Mrs. Barry reclined on her couch before the cheery blaze of a bright wood-fire in their cozy flat, and near her sat Ronald Maynard, older, sterner, graver looking than in the stormy times at Russell, yet wonderfully improved by the vigorous life in the sun and the wind of the wide northwest. His brave young eyes were shining with new hope and eagerness, however. His heart was throbbing in his breast, for what Mrs. Barry had to say thrilled him.

"She would never have said no, then, Ronald, had she not believed you were in honor bound to another girl—even though you might have ceased to love her; and now that she knows the truth, and now that people at Russell have written so fondly and sweetly to her since they learned of Williams' death, and all he said to you and to Captain Ray, she's another girl. All her old joyous manner has returned. Just wait till you— Mercy! There she comes now, and it isn't time for an hour yet. Quick! Go into the dinning-room. Then, after she has come in, let yourself into the hall and go straight through into the parlor, and wait there till I call you. It wouldn't be fair to surprise her this way. She thinks you still in Wyoming."

Promptly he obeyed. The *portière* was still slowly waving behind him when her quick, light

footstep was heard as she hurriedly entered. He could not resist stopping one instant to hear the sweet tones of the voice he loved, but Mrs. Barry spoke first.

"Why, Priscilla mine, what brings you back so soon? I thought you were to go——"

"Oh, I was, but just down the avenue I met our postman, and he smiled and said he had letters— and I opened mine— It said-- It was from Mrs. Freeman— It told me— Oh, let me light your lamp and then you read it."

"But I'd rather hear it at once, Nat. It must have been something important to bring you back so soon."

"It said—It's about—" But even now she could not trust herself to speak his name. Her eyes were dilating, her soft cheeks flushed. "Mrs. Barry," she impulsively asked, "is it so? Did you know his sister was very ill—and he'd been sent for?"

"Not until very lately, Nat."

Without ever throwing off her hat and gloves, the girl was again on her knees, and gazing searchingly into the gentle face on the pillow.

"Who wrote?" she asked.

"He did — to Major Barry. I can't call him colonel yet. You know he had written to you be-

fore, and your turn, by your own directions, only comes——"

"He only wrote when he sent poor Harry's old silk bag with aunty's picture and—that hateful money. Where did he write from?"

"From her home. She is very ill."

"Then he won't be coming here?" And the blue eyes were glancing pleadingly one minute, then hiding behind their snowy lids the next.

"I don't see how he can be—coming, Nat."

The bright color faded from the rounded cheeks and left them piteously white.

"He has been lovely to you, Nathalie," murmured her friend, caressing now the restless little hand as it found its way into hers. "If he should want you to do something for him—who risked his life to save yours—who never rested until he had rescued your good name, too—would you do it?"

But here the *portière* began violent and unaccountable undulations. Nathalie's head was bowed and she couldn't see. Mrs. Barry's eyes were blinded and she wouldn't see.

"What could he ask of me now—after—" faltered the girl.

"After you refused him?" said Mrs. Barry, a teasing little smile playing about her lips. "It

isn't much—provided I go too— It's to go to see his sister."

Nathalie sprang to her feet. "I don't believe—" she began indignantly. "You never were unkind to me before—Mrs. Barry." The words came in a big sob. The tears came raining from her bright blue eyes. Mrs. Barry's arms were outstretched—her heart was filled with dismay and compassion in an instant.

"Nathalie, Nathalie, I shouldn't have teased! I *was* unkind. I never knew it meant so much. Forgive me, dear one. There, there, don't cry. Run into the parlor. You'll find the letter there somewhere—or something that'll tell you all you want to know."

And as the girl, half sobbing still, hastened from the room, in came Maynard, all dismay.

"The door was locked! I couldn't get through! I *had* to stay. I had to hear. Why, didn't you see the *portière* shaking?"

"Never mind," smiled Mrs. Barry. "She's past my comforting. Go quickly and help her find that letter or that—something."

Nathalie had searched the desk and mantel. She was fumbling for the button of the electric light as he reached the arched doorway. The heavy curtains fell behind him as the bright, sudden glare responded

to her touch, and when she turned to renew the hurried search she saw him, barely arm's length away—no! it could not have been that far, for despite her struggles, her furious blushes, her fluttering heart and panting breath, the little cry—half fright, half joy, with which she greeted him—died on her lips—and his.

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